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Tales

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JULY, 1955

Robert Bloch's hilarious new novel

THE BIG BINGE



Introducing the



A U T H O R



Robert Bloch



I 'VE got a problem. Your editor has asked me for a "650 word autobiography." That's tough. How can I get a 650-word autobiography out of a life that's been just a 30-word squib?

If you think I'm kidding, let's take a look at the record. And then play the flip side.

Like the majority of you readers, I was born. In my case (*Bloch vs. Humanity*) the event occurred on April 5th, 1917, in Chicago. I misspent my youth here, in Maywood, Illinois, and in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I had a dull childhood, because in those days juvenile delinquency hadn't been invented yet.

My ambition was to grow up to be the heir to a fortune — an occupation for which I am eminently

suited — but so far it has not been realized.

Accordingly, at the age of fifteen or thereabouts, I tried my hand at writing. This got ink all over my fingers, so I adopted a pen (an orphan, name of Parker). Then I rented a typewriter, and in order to pay for it, started to sell stories. The first sale was to *Weird Tales*. I was seventeen and foolish, so I kept on. Nothing has changed since then except that I'm not seventeen any more.

I have written steadily (and at times, unsteadily) through the years, in a variety of media: for eleven years I wrote copy for an advertising agency. I've also ghost-written political speeches and literature, done radio and television

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JULY, 1955

Imaginative Tales

Uproarious Science-Fantasy Novel

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by Robert Bloch

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Dramatic Science-Fiction Novella

... SO VERY DARK

by Daniel F. Galouye

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ALL STORIES
NEW AND
COMPLETE

The Editorial.....

BOB Bloch is setting himself some kind of a record with his feature novel in this issue. This makes four issues in a row that have sported his name on the cover . . . maybe not exactly a record but a mighty fine batting average!

THERE is, of course, a reason why Master Bloch is becoming a virtual "fixture" in TALES. The lad writes not only one fine story after another, but he also has that gift peculiar to top-notch authors—imagination.

THIS is not intended to be a pun upon our title—or that of our sister science fiction magazine, IMAGINATION. (Our titles, you'll note were carefully chosen to symbolize the *best* in fiction entertainment!) Point is, a writer who can come up with interesting and unique ideas is a rarity—especially in the science-fantasy field of literature. Today the so-called "trend" in imaginative fiction seems to be a combination of highly technical, philosophical, or downright neurotic themes. Somewhere along the line writers—or editors as the case may be—have forgotten the simple and basic requisite of a story: to entertain.

NOW entertainment in fiction is achieved through intelligent use of the imagination. We all like adventure—with all the trials,

tribulations, and fun which are a part of it. In imaginative stories where the stops are pulled out and anything can happen, the adventures we can have as readers are boundless. If, on top of everything else those adventures are funny—even ludicrous—we can safely say we've been entertained in high fashion!

THE Bloch stories written for *IMAGINATIVE TALES* are high fashion entertainment indeed! We intend to keep Bob busy—entertaining you. And of course, other writers too who wish to depart from mechanically produced fiction and have fun for a change with their work. In TALES, anything goes!

• • • • • *wlh*



"Who's the square?"

Secrets
entrusted
to a
few



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THERE are some things that cannot be generally told—things you ought to know. Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for personal power and accomplishment in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of the hidden processes of man's mind, and the mastery of life's problems. Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

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THE BIG BINGE

by

Robert Bloch

Ever wonder what would happen if you let your inhibitions run wild? Elmer Klopp had quite a few — and they were galloping all over town! . . .

I'M not going to guarantee the truth of everything in this story. To begin with, I heard it from a friend who heard it from a friend — and you know what that means. One or two of the events seem to strain my credulity to the point where it may have to wear a truss.

But on one point I'm reasonably certain, so let's start right there. The grasshopper was invented in a college town.

The grasshopper, for the benefit of you lucky, lucky people who have never encountered it, is a green drink. It contains, among other ingredients mercifully nameless, *creme de menthe*, and the color may account for its name. However I prefer to think it's called a grasshopper because after imbibing two or three you really start hopping.

Elmer Klopp found that out the hard way.

He downed the first foaming concoction about four in the afternoon, one day late in the month of October. Let it be said in his defense that the bleak, rainy day contributed to his mood. The grasshopper was merely a catalytic agent. As time went on, it became cataleptic.

Elmer was the sole customer in Ye Olde Gin Mill, and that was just as well. For a second grasshopper jumped down his gullet, and then a third. They may have been called grasshoppers, but they were acting more like locusts.

The locusts swarmed. They rose to his brain and ate away awareness. By six o'clock, Elmer Klopp was in a green fog. He sat there at the bar of Ye Olde Gin Mill and let it swirl around him. Somehow

it brought tears to his eyes.

All at once a face peered out of the fog and wiggled its lips at him. It was a red face, with hair and eyebrows to match. Elmer thought it looked very pretty in the fog. After looking at it for several moments he realized there was a body attached to it, and recognized the proprietor of Ye Olde Gin Mill, one Michael Finn.

Mr. Finn was addressing him.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

Elmer Klopp took out his handkerchief and blew his nose. Some of the fog disappeared. And back came bitter reality — the bitter reality that had driven him into the tavern in the first place, caused him to drink for the first time in his twenty-two years.

He leaned forward and looked at Michael Finn gravely. "Can you keep a secret?" he asked.

"Sure thing," said the bartender. "What is it — woman trouble?"

Elmer shook his head. "No," he said. "Another kind."

The bartender sighed. "Don't try and fool me," he warned. "I been in this business for ten years, and there *ain't* no other kind of trouble. Guys with secrets always turn out to have woman trouble."

"Do they?" Elmer asked. "I'll bet you've heard some unusual stories."

"Only two," Michael Finn re-

plied. "All woman trouble can be divided into two kinds. Either a guy is after some dame he can't get hold of, or he's got some dame he can't get rid of." Michael Finn's eyes took on a look of bloodshot compassion. "Come on, now, which kind is yours?"

Elmer sat up straight. He was getting soberer by the moment. "Neither," he insisted. "My problem is worse."

"Trust me," said the bartender.

"Well," Elmer sighed. "I'm drinking for the first time in my life because I want to be an S. O. B."

Michael Finn's eyes now registered bloodshot astonishment. "You do?" he breathed. "And you sit there and admit it?"

"Why not?" Elmer was defiant. "Nothing would make me prouder than to become an S. O. B."

"And you think drinking will help?"

"Most of them drink, don't they?"

THE bartender nodded emphatically. "I've had my share of S. O. B.s in here, lapping it up," he declared. "But I wouldn't blame their condition on liquor. You can get to be an S. O. B. in a lot of ways."

"No I can't," Elmer said. "That's just the trouble. They won't let me."

"Who won't let you?"

"Why the other S. O. B.s, of course!" Elmer downed the rest of his grasshopper. "They know I had my heart set on it, but do you think they cared? Why, I would have been one of the best-behaved S. O. B.s on the campus. Sort of a model S. O. B., you might say. I would have behaved like a true S. O. B. to everybody I met — my friends, the professors, the co-eds, everybody! It would have been like a career to me."

"Some career," the bartender muttered. "But say, I don't follow you. You talk as if the rest of the S. O. B.s had some kind of club and kept you out of it. Don't tell me them guys have organized a union?" He reflected for a moment. "Not that it would be a bad idea. So many S. O. B.s running around these days, they'd have quite a membership."

"You don't understand," Elmer insisted. "The S. O. B.s are exclusive. They have standards to maintain."

"You mean you got to pinch babies and seduce old maids before you can get it?" Michael Finn was interested. "This I didn't know."

"Oh, nothing like that. But you need a certain status, and I guess I just don't have it. I'd never be well known like most of the S. O. B.s, I guess."

"Don't be discouraged," the

bartender soothed. "You're young yet. If you really got your heart set on being an S. O. B. you can probably make it. Why don't you start planning ahead—maybe you can figure out a way of cheating some widows and orphans, or robbing a bank or something."

Elmer sat up even straighter. "I'll have you know that true S.O.B.s don't indulge in that sort of thing," he announced. "An honest S. O. B. is sober, truthful, law-abiding and kind."

"Not the ones I met," Michael Finn murmured.

"All S. O. B.s are strictly legitimate," Elmer told him.

"Hey!" The bartender wiped his forehead with the bar-rag. "Are you sure we're both talking about the same kind of S.O.B.?"

"There's only one kind on this campus," Elmer assured him. "The members of the Sigma Omega Beta fraternity. S. O. B. —that's their initials."

Michael Finn turned away. "Oh," he said, in a strangled voice. "Well, on that I buy a drink." He began to concoct the insecticide for another grasshopper.

"So you go to school here, eh?" he asked, over his shoulder. "What are you, a senior?"

"Sophomore," Elmer replied. "Got a late start. I did a hitch in the service. My folks both

passed away before I got out, so I decided to get an education. That's why I came to Hardnox."

He accepted the drink gratefully. Michael Finn watched him down it.

"How do you like it?" he asked.
"The drink? Perfect."

"No, the school."

"Not so good," Elmer confessed. "When I entered the University of Hardnox, I thought I was going to do more than study. I thought I'd make friends, have a little social life. My folks are gone and I'm lonesome. But here I am a sophomore and nothing's happened. I had my heart set on being pledged to Sigma Omega Beta—and they passed me up. Guess I'm not important enough to bother with."

"Good student?"

"Pretty good. But lately I can't seem to concentrate on my studies."

"What about sports?"

"Oh, I went out for football. But I don't have the build for it. Coach Gutz put me on the third-string and I've never played yet." Elmer winced. "He thinks I'm chicken, I guess."

The bartender nodded. "Buster Gutz is a hard man," he replied. "But did you ever stop to figure maybe he's right about you?"

"In what way?"

"Well, maybe it's none of my business, but I'm going to say it anyway. You know, being a bartender is sort of like being a psychologist. I mean, you see all kinds of people day after day, night after night. You watch 'em trying to have a good time, you listen to them when they got troubles. And after a while you get so you can sort of size them up."

"Way I've got you sized up, you're too normal."

Elmer blinked. "Normal? What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing. If you're happy. But you ain't happy, chum. You're miserable. Like you said, you came to college hoping to make friends. You been a fair student, you went out for football, you behaved yourself—like you said, this is the first time you even took off on a little toot. And maybe that's just the whole trouble. You're so normal nobody even notices you. If you raised hell now and then, perhaps you'd amount to something. Better to be an S.O.B.—either kind of an S.O.B.—than to be nobody at all."

THE young man shook his head at the bartender in bewilderment. "This is the first time anybody ever suggested such a thing," he confessed. "I wouldn't know how to begin."

"Take women," Michael Finn said.

"I'd like to," Elmer assured him. "Only I don't know any I can take."

"You see?" The bartender shrugged. "You're just too average to even attract a dame. But the more I think of it, the more I'm positive that's what you need. A nice, good looking chick with a figure like this Gina Lollobrigida, say. You like Gina Lollobrigida?"

"She has her points," Elmer admitted. "But where would I ever find such a girl?"

Michael Finn didn't answer. He merely gulped and stared at a point directly behind Elmer's back.

Elmer turned and almost collided with the body of a girl. It was the kind of body it would be pleasant to collide with; and it was certainly Lollobrigidean in every sense of the word. Elmer stared into an oval, upturned face and encountered a pair of dark eyes. The eyes were not looking at him, however, their gaze was reserved for the bartender.

"Sorry, Miss," Michael Finn said. "I didn't see you come in."

"Oh, that's all right." The girl smiled. "I've been here for quite some time, as a matter of fact. Sitting in that booth over there."

"Then you heard—" Elmer began to redden.

For the first time she looked

directly at him, and Elmer finished the job. "Yes," she admitted. "I couldn't help but overhear your remarks. And I must say I agree with your bartender friend."

"About me? But you don't even know me!"

"That can be easily rectified." The girl gave him a long, cool stare. "You seem to be about as simple as they come. But that's not why I'm here."

"No?"

"No." She paused, then continued. "I heard you were looking for a woman. What I want to know is—would I do?"

"Do?"

"Very monosyllabic, aren't we? Well, that doesn't matter. All I need is a yes-or-no answer. And the question is—how would you like to come up to my apartment?"

Elmer Klopp stared at the brunette, and somewhere he found an answer. "How would I like to come up to your apartment?" he murmured. "Why, with the greatest possible alacrity. That's how."

"Come on, then," smiled the girl. "I simply can't wait to get you on the couch."

Michael Finn let out a strangled gasp. As Elmer descended from his stool, the bartender reached out and tried to grasp his arm.

"Wait a minute, son," he whispered, wheezily. "Maybe you

and I better have a little heart-to-heart talk, first. Dames can be quite a problem—they take a lot of handling."

"Never mind," flashed the girl. "I'm sure this gentleman can do his own handling without any further instructions."

Grasping Elmer's arm, she dragged him out of Ye Olde Gin Mill and into the night.

The rain had ceased, and a moon peered through ragged clouds. The girl led him over to a car parked at the curb.

"Climb in," she said. "It's only a short drive."

It was, but none too short for Elmer. He glanced at the dark-haired damsel beside him and realized he should be trying to make conversation. But what the bartender had said was true; Elmer had little or no experience with women. He didn't even know how to make conversation, let alone anything else. And he had always let alone anything else.

For her part, the girl was equally silent. She didn't so much as glance his way—just drove swiftly and expertly up the campus. They turned off on a wide street bordered by stately trees, then drew to a halt before a large, old-fashioned house set well back on a big lawn.

"Here we are," she announced. "We'll sneak in the back way. My

apartment's on the third floor, and I don't want to risk anyone seeing us going up together." She gripped his arm conspiratorially, and Elmer suddenly realized that her nearness—bottled and distributed in scented, liquid form—was so overpowering it would soon run all other intoxicants off the market.

Together they circled the walk and found the rear entrance. The girl switched on a light, then removed her shoes. "Take yours off, too," she commanded. "And walk softly."

They tiptoed up the stairs, until they reached the big white door on the third landing.

"Here we are," the brunette whispered. She fumbled with a key, opened the door, groped for a lamp-switch. "Come in," she urged, and Elmer was conscious of the suppressed excitement in her voice—matching the suppressed excitement in his own breast, where his heart seemed to be practicing for a *mambo* contest.

Was this it? Was this really the beginning of a new, rich life after all?

He couldn't quite believe it. But here he was. Here he was, in her apartment. Yes, and she hadn't been fooling—the big red couch dominated the room.

Elmer watched her as she removed her coat, fluffed out her

hair, and rolled up her sleeves. She was humming, now, and smiling. Suddenly she turned to him and her eyes gleamed with excitement.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" she breathed. "Hurry up and lie down on the couch."

Elmer gasped. "Y-you really mean it?" he whispered.

"Of course I mean it, stupid," said the girl. "Lie down on the couch and let me start psychoanalyzing you!"

CHAPTER II

ELMER Klopp stared. "Psychoanalyze me?" he demanded. "Is *that* why you invited me up here?"

"Of course. What other reason could I possibly have?" the girl retorted. Then she paused, flushing indignantly. "Surely you didn't misconstrue my intentions?"

"I guess I did," Elmer admitted. "And I beg your pardon. I've never misconstrued a woman before in my life."

"That's just why I brought you here," the girl told him. "When you were talking to the bartender about not knowing any women, I got interested. I thought I'd like to find out about your sex-life."

"Then you are interested in sex, after all?"

"Of course," said the girl. "After

all, I mean, what else is there?"

"What else indeed?" Elmer agreed. "Sure you don't want to join me on the couch?"

"No," she declared. "I'm just interested in sex."

"So am I. That's why I made the suggestion."

"I'm talking about sex in the abstract," she answered. "Not in the concrete."

"Sex in the concrete — that *would* be rather messy, come to think of it."

"See here," the brunette interrupted. "There's no need to be flippant. I don't believe you think sex is as important as I do."

"Try me and see," Elmer suggested.

"Very well, then—lean back and start talking."

"Talking?"

"Certainly. How else does one approach sex?"

"I'd heard there were more direct methods."

She sighed and bit her lip. "We certainly don't seem to speak the same language," she observed. "I'm speaking of my interest in sex from the psychiatric standpoint. There's nothing personal in it for me, nothing at all."

"Come to think of it, there hasn't been a helluva lot in it for me, either," Elmer volunteered. "But a pretty girl like you—" He paused. "Say, are you

really a psychiatrist?"

"I'm not a psychiatrist," the brunette admitted. "Not yet, anyway. Just a graduate student. Next year I start my pre-med training. But meanwhile, I'm doing a thesis on maladjustment amongst college students, and I thought I'd get your case-history for my records."

She sat down next to the couch, grabbing a notebook and pen from the end-table. "Let's begin at the beginning," she said, crisply. "Your name?"

"Elmer Klopp." He sat up, eyeing her. "Come to think of it, what's yours?"

"Ada," she told him. "Ada Noid."

"Not old Perry Noid's daughter?"

"I'm his niece. My uncle is not married."

"Then this must be his house." Elmer gazed around the room with reawakened interest. "Gosh, it *looks* normal enough."

"Why shouldn't it look normal?" Ada demanded.

"Well - uh—I guess you know the rumors about your uncle's place."

"My uncle does not run a boarding-house."

"Rumors." Elmer spelled the word. "They say he has all kinds of crazy machines he uses in his experiments."

Ada drew herself up erect. "First of all, 'crazy' is a word without clinical significance," she said. "Secondly and more important, my uncle is head of the Psychiatry Department of this University. He is a brilliant scientist, even though he may be just a wee bit batty."

"Is he the one who got you interested in this sort of work?"

"Yes. He adopted me when I was only a baby. If it hadn't been for him, I'd have—" The girl paused. "But I'm supposed to be interviewing you."

"Forget it," Elmer said. "You wouldn't get much of a case-history out of me, anyway. I've led a dull life. Let's just talk, instead."

SO they talked, and before he knew it, Elmer was giving her his case-history in conversational form. He didn't tell his story the way he had to the bartender; somehow the presence of the ravishing brunette inspired a greater intimacy. It was mainly a confession—not of misdeeds but of lack of any deeds; a recital of shyness and loneliness.

From time to time Ada nodded in agreement. "I know what you mean," she said. "I've heard things like this before. You'd be surprised if you knew just how many young people today are really lonely in-

side. The introvert, the isolated personality, is out of fashion—and adolescents strive to conform. Hence the meaningless fads in fashion, speech, amusement, all part of the tendency to seek group-approval and in-group status. But underneath many a crewcut is a hidden egghead, if you know what I mean."

"I know." Elmer nodded. "And I'm just beginning to discover that underneath some Italian-cuts there can be some mighty good sense. I—I'd like to see your postgraduate paper some time."

"My thesis?" It's incomplete, and what I've written is still in the first draft. But if you really are interested, I could get it for you."

"I wish you would."

"It's in the closet," Ada told him. "Somewhere in back on the top shelf here. Everything's such a mess." She regarded the chair somewhat dubiously. "I better not try standing on this—it might collapse."

"Let me lift you up," Elmer volunteered, gallantly.

"Well—"

"Come on."

He put his arms around Ada's waist and boosted her up. She was heavier than he'd expected, but pleasantly so.

"Move in a little closer," she called. "I can't reach."

Elmer moved in a little closer, and promptly got his head tangled in a cluster of dresses hanging from the closet-hooks.

"Steady!" she commanded. "Quit moving your neck that way."

"Ummppplfff," Elmer explained. "Can't—see—"

"Look out!" Ada cried. "Oh, that dress around your neck—you're choking—here, let me unwind it—"

She leaned down and tried to disengage the garment from Elmer's throat. Elmer promptly lost his balance. With a strangled grunt, he toppled to the floor. Six dresses and Ada fell on top of him.

"Let me out of here!" he gasped. "Here, let me get this skirt off my face—"

"That's *my* skirt!" Ada exclaimed. "Quit tugging at it!"

But the damage was already done, or rather, undone. The skirt came free in Elmer's hand. Ada coiled up in his lap and grabbed for it.

At that particular moment the door opened and a short, bald-headed gentleman in evening clothes waddled into the room. He looked like a penguin with a pince-nez. He looked like—

"Perry Noid!" breathed Elmer. "Merciful God!"

"I am not a deity," Professor Noid observed, drily. "And if I were, I doubt if I would be in—

clined towards mercy in this particular situation. Might I ask, young man, just what you are doing with my niece?"

"Why — research—" Elmer stammered. "I mean, she just invited me up here for a little experiment—"

Perry Noid glared through the pince-nez. "An experiment involving the removal of her clothing?" he demanded.

"Just going through her effects," Elmer explained. "She said she was going to show me her thesis."

"Her what?"

"My thesis, Ada corroborated. "We were looking for it in the closet, but I guess it's not there. I was just going to ask Elmer here to rummage through my drawers—"

"Rummage indeed!" snapped Professor Perry Noid. "Exhibitionism is bad enough, but I draw the line at sadism."

Elmer stood up. "I assure you my intentions were perfectly honorable," he said.

"That's right." Ada rose and slipped into her skirt once more. "As a matter of fact, if anyone's to blame, I am. I invited this young man up to my room. I've been taking his case-history."

"Nonsense." Perry Noid removed his pince-nez and polished the lenses on the edge of his goatee. "How often have I told you

that such methodology is archaic, outmoded? The wish is father to the man. Find out the nature of the wishes, the daydreams, and you have a clue to the *gestalt*. Gratify those wishes; and all traces of neurosis or psychosis vanishes. To paraphrase the old rhyme, 'neuroses are fled, psychoses are through.' All this chap or anyone else needs is a few sessions with the *Psycopathfinder*."

A DA sniffed. "That's all very interesting," she said. "But I notice you still teach your classes to use the orthodox approach in therapy."

"Naturally," Professor Noid restored both the pince-nez and his goatee to their proper places. "You know I must. My invention is still in the experimental stage. Until I am satisfied that it is perfected, until the results can be demonstrated and proven before an accredited group of investigators, I must keep my own theories secret. But surely you, my own niece, should have faith in my methods. Instead, I find you sneaking young men up to your room in the middle of the night—"

"It's not the middle of the night," Ada declared. "It's scarcely eight o'clock. Why, the homecoming rally doesn't start for another hour and a half yet."

"What's the home-coming rally

got to do with it?" demanded her uncle. "You didn't look as though you were attending any rally just now."

"But I intended to go," Ada protested. "I'm riding on one of the floats."

"What about this person?" Professor Noid turned to Elmer. "I warn you, the explanation had better be good. Don't tell me he was getting you into your costume for the homecoming rally. This I wouldn't believe, unless by some chance you plan to go as Lady Godiva." He paused. "Well, I'm waiting."

Ada flashed Elmer a desperate glance. "It's really very simple," she said. "Actually, I was just taking his case-history as a sort of preliminary. I meant to surprise you with him."

"Instead I surprised you with him," the Professor nodded. "But just what do you mean, surprise me?"

"Well," the girl improvised. "You've been talking about the Psychopathfinder, and verifying your experiment. And it occurred to me that Elmer, here, would be the perfect subject. So I was going to check his background and then bring him to you."

"Really? That was very thoughtful. And it's true, I've been looking for a human subject. Of course, I suppose you've explained that

an experiment might be dangerous."

"Not with him," Ada said, quickly. "I made sure of that in my interview. He has practically no trace of traumatic incident, and his sex-drive is almost non-existent."

"How did you find that out?" asked the Professor, then added hastily, "No, don't tell me! But are you sure he understands what is involved in such a test?"

"Of course." Ada took a deep breath, and again looked at Elmer imploringly. "As a matter of fact, he volunteered. Didn't you, Elmer?"

If she hadn't taken the deep breath, Elmer probably wouldn't have answered as he did. Certainly if she hadn't taken a deep breath *and* worn that particular sweater, he wouldn't. But the combination brooked no denial. "Y-yes," he said. "Anything you say."

If the deep breath did its work, the deep sigh of relief that followed completed the job. But the Professor paid no attention to the by-play. He rubbed his hands.

"Let's get started, then," he said. "You'll find my methods a bit unusual, but don't let that disconcert you. For example, just now you may have noticed how I rubbed my hands."

"Flaccidly," Elmer observed. "That's right. Whenever one

reads a book or a story, one inevitably finds characters who rub their hands briskly. I got to thinking about it and decided we adhere too closely to the conventions. From that time on I made a practice of rubbing my hands flaccidly, if at all. Mine is an iconoclastic nature."

HE led the way down the hall, chattering as the two young people followed.

"I suppose this iconoclastic streak is what led to my original break with orthodox theory," he remarked. "After years of teaching sophomorons the so-called basic elements of psychiatry according to the standard texts, I began to question the validity of their principles. I found myself taking everything with a grain of *gestalt*. The id, the ego and the super-ego may serve their purpose as theoretical concepts, but in actual practice a psychiatrist finds it hard to effect a cure. Even the so-called normal students seem aberrated to me. Just a bunch of crazy, mixed-up ids."

"What's he talking about?" Elmer muttered to Ada, as they trailed the Professor down the stairs.

"He's explaining how he got started on his experiments," she told him. "The thinking that led to the building of the Psychopath-

finder."

"I finally came to the inevitable conclusion," the Professor was saying, as he ushered them into his study. "Psychiatric treatment, as normally administered, is largely useless. Anybody who goes to a psychiatrist ought to have his head examined."

The Professor sat down behind his desk. On the wall overhead was a large sign, reading SHRINK!

"Fortunately I had an excellent background in the physical sciences. My work in shock-therapy, electro-encephalography, stood me in good stead. I began to think of constructing a mechanical analyzer."

You mean a psychiatry machine?" Elmer asked, interested in spite of himself.

"Why not? In effect, the so-called standard Lie-Detector is just that. True, its functions are limited, but it does effectively analyze certain psychic components. The cyberneticists, with their computing machines—their mechanical brains—gave me a further clue to the construction of what I finally came to call the Psychopath-finder." Professor Noid paused and milked his goatee with thoughtful fingers. "No doubt Ada has told you about my own personal theories of analytic procedure."

Elmer opened his mouth, but Ada answered for him. "I ex-

plained everything," she said. "He knows a great deal about psychiatry."

"Good." The Professor smiled. "How do you feel about the cathartic method?"

"Never use 'em myself," Elmer said, truthfully. "Glass of hot water in the morning is just as effective."

"True! I can see you've thought the problem through, just as I did. Ordinary analysis, even so-called depth-analysis, is just a waste of time. Removing inhibitions and psychic blocs by searching out the original causation buried in the subconscious is a lengthy procedure. Much easier to dramatize those suppressed desires and thus eliminate the personality defects."

"But are you sure it will work?" Ada asked.

"Now you're talking like one of my stupid colleagues," the Professor snapped. "Full of prejudice and dogma. No wonder that psychotherapy today is so psychopathetic! Of course it will work —didn't I tell you I've already tested the machine on those white rats? And then on some black rats, too?" He glanced at Elmer. "You'll find I'm like that all down the line," he said. "Broadminded. I don't draw the color-line. I believe all rats were created equal."

"I didn't hear about the rats,"

Ada said.

"Well, you won't hear about them now," the Professor declared. "Instead, if you'll step this way, I'll show them to you."

He rose and led them to a door set in the wall of his study. Producing a key, he unlocked it and opened the way into what proved to be a large and well equipped laboratory.

"Why, this is quite a place!" Elmer marvelled, glancing about the white-tiled room and noting the elaborate electrical apparatus, the leaping arcs and sputtering retorts.

"Isn't it?" The Professor rubbed his hands languidly. "I never could have afforded to build it myself. I bought it second-hand from a Hollywood studio after they were through using it in a science-fiction movie. Got the whole thing for less than five thousand dollars, including two rubber Martians and an old Frankenstein's monster costume."

HE walked over to some cages near the wall. "Here are the rats," he proclaimed. "Take a look at the difference."

Elmer and Ada peered into the cage. Three or four rats, sleek and fat, slumbered peacefully.

"I don't see anything changed about them," the girl said. "They're awfully plump, yes,

but—"

"Don't touch the bars!" cried the Professor. "They'll crumble!"

"Why?"

"Look and see."

They looked and saw. In place of the conventional bars, the front of the cage was criss-crossed with long strips of aged cheese.

"Limburger!" Ada sniffed. "Why did you put up bars made out of cheese?"

"That's just the point, my dear. I didn't. The rats did. After one treatment, they commenced to exert latent psychic energy towards their suppressed goals. The same electrical energy manifested by the brain in encephalographs was transformed into positive use by the machine. Their wishes took substance—and the bars of their cage turned to cheese."

"Let me get this straight," Elmer said. "You mean you've got a new method of psychotherapy? A machine that makes wishes come true?"

"Utilizing the basic energy of the human brain," the Professor assented. "That's all there is to it. A preliminary mechanical hypnosis by-passes the inhibitory blocs on both the conscious and subconscious level. The energy released immediately formulates the suppressed desires that are usually dramatized in a distorted form in dreams, neurosis or psychosis. Once mater-

ialized as independent entities, the subject can gratify his wishes and eliminate conflict. Or, on another level, he can materialize his phobias and conflict-images and thus be rid of them. In either case, the end-result is complete sanity."

"The rats were crazy for cheese and now they've got all the cheese they want so they're satisfied, eh?" Elmer muttered. "I suppose if you tried it on dogs, they'd want bones?"

"Not always," smiled the Professor. "I *did* try it on dogs, of course. Two of them were what you might call fairly well-adjusted to begin with. They materialized bones in their cages. The third dog chose to materialize a half a dozen lamp-posts." He coughed discreetly. "Of course, one must expect some unusual results when one in effect grants every wish. I remember I made the mistake once of trying it on rabbits and—"

He shrugged. "But never mind. If my niece vouches for your basic normality, you should have nothing to fear. In fact, this experiment may have pleasant results for you. Not quite as pleasant as for the rabbits, perhaps, but—"

He drew Elmer over to the other wall. A large black machine stood next to a switchboard; connecting the two were a dozen wires and cables. The machine itself resembled nothing so much as an old-

fashioned stereoptican, such as can still be found in the Penny Arcade at an amusement park. The only difference appeared to be that this machine's viewing-surface was enlarged so that the entire head could fit inside.

"This is it?" Elmer asked.

"This is it," nodded Professor Noid. "The Psychopathfinder. The greatest revolutionary concept in therapy since the discovery of sex! First Freud and then Noid! My boy, rest assured that if your volunteer efforts prove successful, you will share my fame. I promise to give you full credit when I write up my monograph—mention your name in a footnote, or something."

"That's mighty nice of you, Professor. But just what do you want me to do?"

"Why, nothing at all. You might care to take a look at the insides of the apparatus, though. Go ahead, stoop down. I'll switch on a light."

Ada stepped forward. "Please," she said. "You're sure he can't be harmed—?"

"Not a chance," boomed the Professor, jovially. "The voltage is infinitesimal; the subject's brain builds up its own charge. No danger at all. Go ahead, my boy—take a look. Stoop to conquer."

Elmer stooped.

The Professor conquered.

Elmer stuck his head into the apparatus, waiting for the light to switch on and a view of the interior to emerge. Instead, something else happened.

THE Professor threw a switch and the machine started to drone and shake. At the same time something pressed tightly against Elmer's temples, neck and forehead. His skull was squeezed and held inside the machine. He began to drone and shake, too. In front of his eyes a spiral pattern appeared—a circular pattern that revolved and held his attention even as his body fought for release. All at once he felt himself falling forward—not physically but psychically. His entire being seemed drawn into that spiral, whirling around and around and around—

"You started the machine!" Ada whispered. "That was a dirty trick!"

"That was the scientific approach," Professor Noid corrected her. "No pre-conditioning. Observe, the hypnotic effect supervenes rapidly. One more notch here and I'll induce deep trance. There! Now to release the energy for image-materialization."

"It's like shock-therapy," Ada said.

"Not at all! This is completely involitional on all levels. Whatever is most completely suppressed

in this young man's mind will manifest itself in actuality once the treatment is over. Note the change in him when I complete the cycle."

He switched off the machine and Elmer's body sagged slightly. Ada ran over to him. "Are you all right?" she murmured, pulling his head out of the opening.

The young man smiled at her. "Sure, I feel fine," he said. "What happened? When does the treatment start?"

"It's all over," Ada told him. She turned and regarded her uncle skeptically. "It's all over, and I don't notice any change in him at all."

"That's right," the Professor agreed. "But you might take a look at yourself. He just stared at you, didn't he?"

"Yes, but —"

Ada glanced down at her body, then clothed herself in a blush.

And well she might, for aside from the blush, Ada was completely naked.

Elmer let out a gasp. "Believe me, I had nothing to do with it," he murmured. "I just looked at you, and your clothes came off — there they are on the floor —"

"So I notice." Ada stepped over the tangled heap and advanced towards him. "I don't know how you managed it," she grated. "But you're going to pay for this little

trick!"

"No!" Elmer protested. "It's not my fault, I assure you."

Ada looked far from assured. The young man retreated towards the door.

"Come back," called the Professor. "It's just the treatment, don't you see? I can explain."

"Over his dead body," Ada suggested. "Which I'll have ready for you in about a minute, now."

But Elmer didn't wait. As the nude female descended upon him; he turned and bolted — through the hall, down the stairs, and out into the night.

CHAPTER III

ELMER kept running until he reached Main Street. Here the crowds gathering for the homecoming parade impeded his progress.

Panting, he slowed down to a walk. At the sight of the students swarming over the sidewalks, he quickly closed his eyes. It seemed the safest thing to do. No telling what might happen if he looked at people.

Something had happened to him, all right. Or all wrong, rather. Professor Noid's machine was probably responsible, but that was no consolation. He didn't care to think about it; what he wanted to do was reach the safety of home and

bed.

Eyes closed, face flushed, hair disheveled, he reeled along the curb.

A voice shouted, "Hey, Klopp!" He recognized the tones.

Despite himself, Elmer halted and turned to confront the porcine visage of the president of Sigma Omega Beta. William Shooter, better and more appropriately known as 'Bull', was a Big Man on the Campus. And well he might be, weighing in the neighborhood of two hundred and twenty pounds. Quite a rough neighborhood it was, too; for 'Bull' Shooter was a football star on the gridiron, an amateur boxer in the ring, and an almost professional wrestler in the back-seat of his convertible.

His wrestling companion tonight seemed to be a voluptuous blonde, who fluttered her long eyelashes coyly at the Big Man.

Elmer didn't share her admiration. He had a pretty accurate notion that 'Bull' Shooter was one of those who had seen to it that he wasn't pledged to the fraternity.

Nor did Elmer have a welcoming smile for Shooter's crony, one Warty Weems. Weems had a girl of his own, a bespectacled redhead with the intellectual look of a codfish who has read a book.

"Come here, Klopp!" commanded Shooter. "Wanna talk to you."

"Sorry," Elmer mumbled, clos-

ing his eyes again. "In a hurry."

He tried to move past, but Warty Weems blocked his path. "You heard what the Big Man said," he grinned. "What's the matter, got no manners?"

"Why, he's drunk!" Shooter whooped. "Sure, that's it! Look at him—staggering along with his eyes closed. Klopp, I'm surprised at you!"

"I'm not drunk," Elmer insisted. "Just in a hurry."

"Then why do you keep closing your eyes?" Shooter came closer, and Elmer realized that if anyone could be accused of intoxication, the Big Man was the logical candidate. "Whatsa matter, don't you like the way my babe looks?"

"She's very pretty, I'm sure," Elmer said, hastily. "But you'll excuse me if I keep my head turned the other way. I—I've seen all I want to see of women for a while."

"What kind of a remark is that?" Warty Weems wanted to know. "And why do you keep looking back over your shoulder?"

"To see if I'm being followed," Elmer explained. "Do either of you happen to notice a naked woman back there?"

"Naked woman?" Shooter perked up his ears to get them out of the way of his grin. "You trying to tell us you're being chased by a naked woman?"

"Well, not exactly. But one did try to attack me a little while ago. I barely escaped. That is, I escaped, and she was bare." Elmer found himself reddening again. "Please, let me go home. This has been a confusing evening."

"No you don't!" Shooter grabbed his arm and arrested his progress. "I want to hear the rest of this business. Little squirt like you comes along and tries to hand me some crud about naked women chasing him — that doesn't go, chum. Now let's have the straight story. How did you get mixed up with this naked woman in the first place?"

"I didn't get mixed up with her." Elmer shook his head. "And she wasn't naked until I undressed her."

"You?" Warty Weems was incredulous.

"With my eyes, of course," Elmer tried to explain. "I just took one look at her and her clothes came off."

"Sounds goofy," observed 'Bull' Shooter.

"Sounds drunk," Warty Weems amended.

"Sounds interesting," the blonde girl ventured.

"Sounds aberrated," snapped the redhead.

"No such thing," Elmer told her. "It was all an accident. But I don't dare to look at women now or the

same thing might happen again. That's why I keep my eyes shut."

"Nonsense," the redhead declared. "It's all pure rationalization. Or impure rationalization. You ought to see a psychiatrist."

"I just did," the young man protested. "And that's how everything started."

'Bull' Shooter took him by the arm. "Now see here, Klopp," he said. "I always had you figured for an oddball character. But when you come around and try to confuse people with a lot of crazy baloney about undressing people with your eyes — that's all, brother! I got a good notion to pop you one, just to teach you a lesson in courtesy."

"Go ahead!" Warty Weems urged, hopping up and down in alcoholic excitement. "Teach him good manners. Break his arm for him!"

THE Big Man on the Campus grinned. "That would be rude," he admonished. "However, I will make you a deal, Klopp. Either you open your eyes and look at us like a human being or I will black them for you."

"C-can't we compromise?" Elmer suggested. "Couldn't I just open one eye?"

"Both," his captor insisted.

"All right — but you'll be sorry."

"Go ahead," urged the redhead. "It will clear up your delusions. Seeing is believing, you know."

"I know," Elmer sighed. "But do you?"

She found out quickly. Elmer opened his eyes and stared at her for a long moment.

"You see?" she cried. "Nothing happened. Say, it's getting chilly this evening, isn't it?"

"P-pick up your clothes," gulped Warty Weems. "You're naked as a coot."

"What do you mean by that statement?" the redhead demanded. "I've always wondered what a coot is and why it's so —" She halted as her gaze travelled down over her body. "Oh!" she gasped. "It's true!"

"I warned you, didn't I?" Elmer reminded. Quickly he tore his eyes away. Unfortunately the next recipient of his gaze was the voluptuous blonde with the long eyelashes.

One glance, however, altered her appearance considerably. First the long eyelashes fell off, and then the voluptuous figure disappeared. As dress and bra vanished, the curves melted away and she stood there in dismay, if nothing else; revealed to all the world as a figure of scrawn.

"Bull" Shooter's reaction was instantaneous. With the courageous chivalry of a big man confronting a little man, he roared, "Undress

my girl, will you? Take this!"

Elmer refused his generous offer by ducking, but the Campus Hero caught him in an armlock. By this time a large group of passing students had halted at the curb, attracted by the sight of a scuffle and the presence of two nude girls. Delighted at their good fortune, they now prepared to witness a murder as an additional bonus.

But Elmer wasn't cooperating. As 'Bull' Shooter tightened his grip, Elmer focussed his attention on his enemy's belt-buckle.

"Pardon me," he panted. "But I think your trousers are falling down."

"Thank you," said Shooter. Then, "Migawd, they *are* down!"

"I'll hold him for you," Warty Weems volunteered.

"Hold your shorts," Elmer advised. And in a moment that's what both of his opponents were doing. Elmer took advantage of the occasion to plunge blindly into the crowd and race away.

"What's going on here?" demanded an elderly gentleman, as Elmer elbowed him aside. "Or should I ask what's coming off here? On second thought, I needn't ask, need I?"

It would have done him no good, for by this time the young man was halfway up the block, and gaining speed. From behind him came shouts and shrieks, but

he didn't bother to look back. He kept going, panting and puffing, until he rounded the corner. Here sheer instinct — and the odor of fermented hops — guided him into a place of refuge. Gasping, Elmer tottered into the dim confines of Ye Olde Gin Mill.

Michael Finn gazed at him patiently from behind the bar. "What's the matter?" he inquired, mildly. "Lumps in the couch?"

Elmer permitted his eyes to open but avoided gazing directly at the bartender. "Give me a drink," he pleaded. "Give me a lot of drinks."

"Grasshoppers?"

"No — I want something in a hurry."

"Little eye-opener, eh?"

"Not that!" Elmer groaned. "Give me something to shut 'em, quick!"

"Double-brandy?"

"A double-double-brandy," the young man amended. "Make it two double-double-brandies."

Shrugging, the bartender poured. Slurping, the young man drank. "Whoosh!" he said. "That's better. Do it again!"

"Now take it easy — you'll pass out if you put it down that fast," Michael Finn warned.

"Just the idea," Elmer said. "Want to pass out. Got to pass out, quick, before I look at too many people. Lucky you don't have any

customers here tonight."

"What's so lucky about it?" Michael Finn wanted to know. "Everybody's at that damned rally and parade. You're the only business I've got." He watched as Elmer took the second double-double brandy and downed it. "Though come to think of it, what more do I need? You're drinking like a whole bar-full of customers."

"More," Elmer demanded.

THE bartender hesitated. "Please," he said. "Are you really serious about wanting to pass out? And if so, why?"

"Told you," Elmer reminded him. "So I won't look at people. When I do, things happen."

"You been looking at that girl, is that it?"

"Yes. I wish I'd never set eyes on her."

"Is she that bad? Seemed like quite a dish."

"A dish without a cover," Elmer amended. "Took one look at her and her clothes came off."

"Tell me more," urged Michael Finn. So Elmer told him more. Elmer, in fact told all; up to and including his recent encounter with 'Bull' Shooter and party.

"You sure you ain't just making this up?" the bartender demanded, when he concluded. "Honest, now — look me straight in the eye."

Elmer looked him straight in

the eye. Michael Finn's tie, shirt and underwear tops flew off. So did his toupee.

"If the rest of you wasn't out of sight back of the bar, I'd have stripped you bare," Elmer told him.

"Then it's the truth you've been telling," the bartender gasped. "The naked truth."

"Exactly. I can't seem to control it either. I look at somebody and — poof! Now do you see why I want to get blind drunk?"

"Only solution," Michael Finn agreed. He dressed thoughtfully. I'll join you in a double-double myself."

He did. Several double-doubles later the two were still discussing the mystery of Elmer's ability and Professor Noid's strange machine.

"Don't know what happened to my mind," the young man said. "But it had better wear off soon. Can't go around this way — turn the whole world into a nudist colony."

"You could wear blinders," Michael Finn suggested.

"I'm no horse."

"An excellent point. I'll drink to that." He paused. "Well, how about keeping your eyes closed permanent-like?"

"Then I couldn't watch television," Elmer protested.

"Well, maybe you could get yourself one of them Seeing Eye

Dogs. He could watch television for you."

"Splendid!" Elmer drank again. "Come to think of it, that's the best way to watch television, judging from most of the programs I've looked at." He blinked. "Know something? I think this brandy is working."

"You mean you can't take clothes off any more? Try me."

"Hold still."

As the bartender posed, Elmer concentrated on his figure with both eyes. For a moment Michael Finn's necktie flapped feebly, then subsided.

"I'm safe!" Elmer exulted. "I don't think I could take the dressing off a piece of lettuce at ten paces."

"Good. One more double-double should do the trick."

"It's already doing something," Elmer confessed. "I'm getting so that I see double-double. F'rinstance, those girls there."

"Those girls?" The bartender turned, just as Ada entered the place.

"So there you are!" she called. "I thought I might find you here!"

"Keep away from me!" Elmer begged.

"It's a deal — just so you don't subject me to another public strip-tease."

"Don't worry about that," Elmer assured her. "I'm all right. Been

drinking — lost my evil eye, or whatever it was."

"Glad to hear it," Ada replied.

"Then you're not angry?"

"Of course not." She settled down on the bar-stool beside him. "My uncle explained everything. It wasn't your fault." She sniffed and stared. "My goodness, you have been indulging, haven't you?"

Elmer leered happily. "Think nothing of it," he said. "Never felt better in my life."

"Take your hand off my knee when you say that," Ada cautioned him.

"Here!" Elmer called. "Let's all have 'nother double-double."

"You've had enough," Ada declared. "One more will bring you face to face with *delirium tremens*. Besides, it isn't safe for you to be drinking like this in your present state. That's why I came looking for you. My uncle wants you to come back and take another treatment in the Psychopathfinder."

"Another treatment?" Elmer shuddered. "Never! Won't catch me sticking my head in that infer'n'l machine, nosiree!"

"But it's all a matter of adjustment — he says the first experiment merely brushed the surface, released some of the common, suppressed fantasies. Another treatment will probe deeper and restore your contact with reality."

"Don't need contact with real-

'ty. 'M doing okay." Elmer wobbled on the stool. "Things going round and round now, but at least got all their clothes on. Dizzy. Must be drunk, all right. Get dizzy then, huh? See things, too."

"Please," the girl begged. "Let me take you back for another treatment. My uncle is worried about you."

"Nothing t'worry 'bout. I'm fine."

"Oh — you!" The girl climbed down from the bar-stool and regarded him indignantly. "And to think I gave up a chance to be in the parade just to come out and argue with a stupid, inebriated—"

"Poo!" Elmer remarked. "Run along, leave me be. Happy like this. Wanna see things."

"See what you please," Ada retorted. "I'm going."

"Tell Prof'ssor I'm happy like I am," Elmer called after her. "Me and my lil old pink elephant."

"What pink elephant?"

"That one, over there, in the corner," Elmer said. "Don't you see him?"

Ada and Michael Finn both stared at the corner, then at each other. Then they stared at Elmer.

"Dear Lord!" breathed Ada. "He does need a treatment, and that's definite!"

"Maybe we all need treatments," Michael Finn shuddered. "You see it, too?"

"I see it," Ada admitted. "We all see it, don't we, Elmer?"

"Tha's right," babbled the young man, happily. "Nice big pink elephant. Biggest and pinkest one I ever saw." He giggled. "Better give it a drink, hey? I think it wants one."

Sure enough, the biggest and pinkest elephant in the world advanced and put its trunk on the bar.

CHAPTER IV

"NOW what do we do?" Ada had accepted and downed her second drink, unable to tear her eyes from the spectacle of the pink pachyderm as it absorbed the greater part of a pony of beer.

"Maybe if you sober Elmer up it'll go away," Michael Finn suggested.

"You're probably right," the girl agreed. "After all, it's just an embodiment of a hallucination. Another form of wishfulfilment."

"You leave my pink elephant alone," Elmer pouted, maudlinly. "See? He loves me. Watch him put his trunk 'round my neck."

"I can't bear the sight!" Ada confessed. She turned to the bartender quickly. "How do we sober him up?" she murmured.

"Fresh air would help."

"Good. I'll take him outside."

"And leave me here alone with that beast? Not on your life, lady!"

"But we can't take him."

"You'll have to take him. After all, he ain't my hallucination."

"Wouldn't you like to keep him for a pet?" Ada asked, desperately.

"Huh. Fine pet!" The bartender regarded the elephant balefully. "Got a hunch he ain't even housebroken."

"Maybe you could train him," the girl argued. "Doesn't the sheer challenge of it grip you? Think of tackling a big job like that."

"I am thinking about it," the bartender replied. "And I don't like it."

"But if you succeeded, you'd be famous." Ada adopted her most cajoling manner. "Why, you could become an authority in the field. Write a book about it, perhaps. *How to Housebreak an Elephant*. Who knows, it might be a best-seller. Worse ones than that have made it."

"I'm no author," said Michael Finn. "And I ain't no wet-nurse to pink elephants, either. I advise you to get him to hell out of here before he gets drunk too. Guzzling up all that beer, anything's liable to happen. Suppose the elephant starts to see pink men?"

"Awright!" Elmer, who had been petting the the pachyderm, now turned and scowled. "I can take a hint. I know when I'm not wanted. Come on, Lucy, le's go."

"Lucy?" Ada frowned. "What kind of a name is that?"

"You an authority on elephant names all of a sudden?" Elmer demanded. "This is my elephant and I'll chris'n her what I please. Named her Lucy on purpose — short for hallucination, see?"

"I see." Ada hesitated. "You aren't really going to walk right out on the street with her like that, are you?"

"Course not!" Elmer climbed up on the bar-stool and tottered triumphantly. "Gonna ride her. Come on, you too."

"Not me!"

"Said you wanted to be in the parade, didn't you? Well, this is your chance."

"Maybe that's a good idea," Michael Finn agreed. "If you join the parade, people will think it's sort of a stunt, like."

"Well—"

Through the door came the sound of cheers and music. The homecoming parade in progress.

"Come on," Elmer urged. "You want me to take 'nother fling at that Psychopachyderm or whatever it is? Got to get to your uncle, then. This is easiest way."

Ada hesitated. Then, "The things one has to do in the interest of science," she muttered. And climbed up behind Elmer on the elephant's back.

Michael Finn lurched around the

bar and opened the door. "Better duck," he cautioned.

They ducked. The pink elephant stepped out across the sidewalk and into the street as the parade moved by. Elmer tugged at its ears and guided it into the procession.

There were stares, gasps, and then applause. In the array of floats and costumed marchers, the pink elephant did not seem too incongruous.

"Hey, this is fun!" Elmer declared, as they lumbered along in the wake of a band. "And you know something? The bartender was right—I *am* sobering up, fast. This air is wonderful!"

"Try to look dignified then," the girl advised. "We may get away with this yet."

And they almost did. Nearing the judge's stand at the head of the street, the elephant plodded majestically past. Elmer was indeed sobering rapidly, and in an effort to convey this good news to Ada, he now turned and stared at the girl.

"I'm all right now," he announced, proudly.

"Oh, fine!" Suddenly she groaned. "You're all right—but look at me. No, don't look at me, you've done it again!"

And he had.

THE crowd and judges were suddenly treated to the spect-

acle of a pink elephant bearing a naked girl who seemed to be clawing and cursing at her male companion.

Cheers mingled with laughter, then turned to shrieks of consternation. For Elmer, glancing about wildly for some means of escape, let his gaze fall on the crowd at random. And wherever it fell, clothes fell with it.

His eyes swept the judges' stand—and literally swept it bare.

"Stop that!" Ada screamed. "You're undressing half the university!"

"I can't help it," Elmer panted. "I'm getting soberer by the minute!"

As if in final proof of the statement, the pink elephant began to wobble precariously beneath them. Then, abruptly, it disappeared.

The two of them plunged to the pavement. Nobody noticed the sudden vanishment, being much too occupied with a search for their missing garments.

Elmer landed with a thump, catching the girl as she descended. "See, it's gone," he muttered. "I'm cold sober."

"I'm cold, period," Ada chattered.

"Take my coat," Elmer urged, gallantly. "Maybe we can find some place and have a drink."

"What? And bring back that pink nightmare again? Not on

your life! We're going to find my uncle right away and get you straightened out."

She dragged him to the sidewalk through the unclad throng, and they sought the sheltering shadow of the trees.

Elmer peered back at the pandemonium in the street. People in varying stages of dress and undress rushed to and from; while from the judging stand, nude gentlemen in top-hats waved their canes and gesticulated indignantly to naked policemen.

"Pity we can't stick around," he sighed wistfully. "Maybe we could have won a prize."

"Will you come on?" panted the girl. "My teeth are chattering. Your coat doesn't begin to cover me in the back here. What do you expect me to do?"

"Nothing," Elmer told her. "Except grin and bare it."

Stifling a groan, the half-naked damsel dragged him off into the night.

CHAPTER V

"SO YOU'RE back," Professor Noid muttered, opening the door hastily.

"In the flesh," said Ada. "As you can all too plainly see."

"Good." The Professor rubbed his hands weakly. "For a while I was a bit worried."

"Nice of you to be concerned," his niece remarked, in a bitter voice. "But there's really nothing to get upset about. Our boy Elmer here has been undressing half the population while sober—and when he was drunk, he materialized a hallucination of a pink elephant."

"A pink elephant? Really?" Professor Noid peered over the top of his pince-nez. "I'd like to have seen it. Full-size, I presume?"

"Very full," Ada said.

"Might I inquire as to its sex?" "Female," Elmer said.

"Ah!" The Professor's goatee wagged excitedly. "Very significant, that. It shows I have succeeded in removing some of your inhibitions."

"I wish you'd remove some of his exhibitions, too," the girl exclaimed. "I'm tired of losing my clothes in public."

"Then let's go inside," the Professor suggested.

"Are you suggesting I lose my clothes again in private?"

"I'm suggesting nothing," her uncle told her. "That's all up to Elmer."

"Like heck it is!" Ada's tone was fervent. "See if you can snap him out of his nude mood altogether."

"Maybe I can get drunk again," Elmer suggested. "It worked once before."

"Then we'd have the elephant

on our hands," the girl reminded him.

"This I'd like to see," the Professor said. "Was it African or Indian, by the way?"

"It was awful!" Ada shuddered. Briefly she recounted the events in the tavern and during the parade. The Professor nodded and made notes.

"How long do you think this will keep up?" Elmer asked.

"I think I can assure you that you won't be troubled after another treatment," Professor Noid said, soothingly. "Now that the commonplace surface fantasies have been uncovered, materialized, and eliminated, we can probe deeper and reach the basic problems. But I promise you, one more session with the Psychopathfinder and your present troubles will be dissipated."

"They're dissipated enough already," Ada grumbled. "You should have seen how drunk he got!"

"Excellent!" The Professor rubbed his hands together in listless abandon. "Before the treatment he'd never have had the courage to get really drunk. Just goes to show he's making progress."

"What's your idea of complete success?" inquired his niece. "When he starts running around committing rape and arson?"

"You needn't be afraid," the Professor soothed. "I doubt if he'd

ever set fire to you."

He led them into the laboratory. The black unit loomed balefully before them.

"Let's go to work," Professor Noid said. "Ada, you take notes."

ELMER blinked dubiously. "I'm not so sure about this," he muttered. "One treatment and I went haywire. What might another do?"

"We won't know until we try. This is all highly experimental."

"And I'm the guinea-pig?"

"You might put it that way, yes. But you're a better guinea-pig than you were beforehand." The Professor regarded him seriously for a moment. "All your life, probably, you've been carrying around this subconscious *voyeuristic* desire to see people in the nude. By fulfilling it, your conflict in this area has been resolved. I'd venture to guess that from now on, you won't want to be a Peeping Tom any more."

"Right," Elmer agreed.

"Also, I'd hazard you've always had a suppressed desire to get blind drunk and allow your fantasies to take over. Hence the rather stereotyped hallucination of a pink elephant. You won't want to surrender to that impulse again, now that you've realized it, will you?"

"Definitely not! I've had my fill of elephants." Elmer grinned. "Now I'm beginning to understand, I think. This machine hypnotizes you, releases inhibitions, and harnesses the electrical energy of the brain to materialize suppressed concepts that cause conflict—is that it?"

"The electro-psychic energy," the Professor corrected him. "And probably not from the brain alone, if the *gestalt* concept is taken into consideration."

"But how do you know how many suppressions I have?" Elmer asked. "Or how many conflicts?"

"You've probably got all of them." Professor Noid butted the air with his goatee. "That's another part of my theory. In orthodox psychiatry, patients are classified according to individual labels. We have the schizoid, the paranoid, the subdivisions of the hebephrenic, catatonic, and so forth. But the majority of authorities admit that there are few classic cases—in which the patient exhibits only the pure, undifferentiated symptoms of a single psychosis. The syndromes tend to overlap. Do you follow me?"

"Vaguely," Elmer admitted. "I sort of tripped and stumbled over that hebephrenic stuff back there."

"Well, it doesn't matter." Professor Noid shrugged. "Point is, my theory holds that every man

possesses the potentialities of *all* the neuroses and psychoses known. In essence, each of us is a latent multiple psychotic—phobic, masochistic, sadistic, cycloid, aggressive, withdrawn, hysterical, compelled, obsessed; a schizophrenic rogue's gallery of conflicting personality components, as it were."

"Were it?" Elmer asked. "Then you mean to say, the next treatment can turn me into anything?"

"Not exactly. It will merely accentuate whatever lies in the next layer of the subliminal and release it. Then we can go on to a still deeper area. It's like peeling an onion."

"But I don't want to be a peeled onion!" Elmer stared fiercely at the Professor. Abruptly, the Professor's clothes dropped.

"Well, I don't want to be peeled, either," the scientist told him. "And I'm sure you can't go around undressing people all the rest of your life, either. You're lucky you got away with it tonight—another such episode and the police might take a hand."

"You're sure the treatment will cure that?" Elmer asked.

"Quite."

"But what if it brings on something worse?"

"We can eliminate the next phase with still another treatment." The Professor dressed thoughtfully.

Elmer was silent. Ada glanced

at him and smiled.

"All right," he said. "I suppose there's no choice."

"Good. Put your head in there."

Elmer approached the machine, bent forward. Once again the Professor threw the switch—there was the droning and the shaking, and the sight of the hypnotic spirals drawing him down. As Elmer sagged, Professor Noid busied himself with various levers on the control-panel.

"You're sure you know what you're doing?" Ada whispered, anxiously.

"Of course," her uncle told her. "Note that I'm stepping up the re-actor-factor. The first treatment had projective results—he externalized, altered his environment. Now we'll try for introjection; a change in himself."

"Don't hurt him," the girl murmured.

"Fond of him, are you?"

"Afraid so. I don't quite know why—he's such a *schmoe*."

"Maternal instinct." The Professor got clever with a lever, "There, I think that does it."

And it did.

ELMER'S sagging body slid to the floor. He sat there for a moment, holding his head in his hands.

"How do you feel?" Ada bent over him, eyes clouded with con-

cern.

"All right." The young man's voice was muffled. He shook his head experimentally. "Better than all right. I feel great!" He took his hands away from his face. "Like a new man!"

"Yikes!" screeched Ada, and bolted for the door.

"What's the matter?" Elmer rose and approached the Professor.

"G-get back!" The psychiatrist cringed against the wall, his goatee sagging in dismay.

"Is something wrong? Tell me?" Elmer insisted.

For answer, the Professor pointed a trembling finger at a mirror in the corner.

Elmer approached it and stared at his own face.

Only it wasn't his own face any more.

Leering up at him from the glass was the reflection of a hairy, brutish countenance—the fanged, fierce and fiendish face of a gorilla.

"Oh!" gasped Ada.

"Oh no!" amended Elmer, feeling his face with furry fingers. "What's the meaning of this monkey-business?"

"I told you the next change would be introjective," the Professor exulted, rubbing his hands in hysterical apathy. "He has uncovered the brutal, primitive side of his nature, the atavistic heritage we all share."

"You can have my share," Elmer groaned. "But speaking of uncovering—these clothes itch."

His paw-like hands scrabbled at buttons and belt, and in a moment he stood before them naked; if a hirsute adult male gorilla can be considered naked.

Ada retreated to her uncle's arms.

"Am I that awful?" Elmer asked, moving forward, his knuckles scraping the floor.

"Worse!" the girl shuddered.

Elmer took another look in the mirror and confirmed the fact. "It's like something out of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*," he muttered.

"True." The Professor stroked his niece with one hand and the goatee with the other. "That particular story has a sound psychological basis. Every one of us has a concealed, primitive side."

"It should be concealed," Elmer told him. "And if you think I'm going to walk around in the body of a gorilla, you're nuttier than I think you are—which, by the way, is considerably." He swayed before them. "Put me back in that machine of yours and give me another treatment, fast."

"But can't you put up with it for just a few hours?" The Professor asked. "Long enough for me to study you a bit? I'd like to try you with a Rohrsach test and the Poretus Maze; see how your re-

flexes respond."

Elmer growled and raised a hairy arm. "I'll show you how my reflexes respond if you don't hurry up and change me back," he threatened.

"Why, what's come over you?" Ada whispered. "You're so savage —"

"It's the bestial aspect," her uncle said. "The change is more than bodily. Maybe I'd better do as he says. No telling what his brutal instincts might lead him to in his present state."

Elmer started over to the Psychopathfinder. "Get busy," he commanded. "I'm so brutal I scare myself. I have the funniest feeling that I want to pound on my chest and roar."

"No, not that!" the Professor begged. "Think of the neighbors. If anyone should hear you now, or see you—"

"Speaking of hearing," murmured Ada. "Seems to me as if there are footsteps on the stairs."

"No!"

"Someone's coming down the hall," the girl insisted. "I'm sure of it."

Professor Noid glanced at Elmer in frantic despair. "Hurry up," he whispered. "Hide yourself, quickly!"

"But where?" Elmer demanded.

"Never mind—lay down on that table over there—do something—

anything—"

Elmer started for the table.

A moment later the door opened and a stranger walked into the room.

CHAPTER VI

"GOOD evening," said the stranger, briskly. "I trust I'm not disturbing anything?"

The Professor offered him a weak smile and weaker handclasp. "No, not at all," he said.

"I rang the doorbell several times but there was no answer. Finding the door open, I took the liberty of coming upstairs. After all, you did invite me over tonight, didn't you? Something about a remarkable discovery you've made?"

"Uh — yes." The Professor turned to Ada. "I don't believe you two have met, my dear. This is Dr. Noodlemayer, head of the Department of Anthropology. My niece, Ada."

Lying on the table, Elmer cocked one eye at the anthropologist. He saw a tall thin man whose bushy eyebrows and mustache seemed interchangeable.

"I know I'm late," Noodlemayer was saying, "but I didn't want to miss the homecoming parade."

"Anything worth seeing?" the Professor asked.

Noodlemayer passed a hand over his forehead. "I'm not sure," he answered. "In fact, since seeing that parade I'm not sure of anything." He pulled a pint bottle from his inside coat pocket. "If you'll forgive me, I think I'll have a medicinal libation." He uncorked the bottle, smiling apologetically at the Professor. "I trust you will ignore this lapse," he said. "Very seldom indulge."

"What it is?" asked Ada, curiously.

"Harmless alcohol," Noodlemayer assured her. "Generally use it to pickle my specimens in." He drank deeply.

"Er—how are your specimens?" the Professor ventured.

"Pickled, as I said," Noodlemayer replied. "And as I soon hope to be, myself." He shuddered, then handed the bottle to his colleague. "That parade tonight! I couldn't believe my own eyes! I was standing near the judging platform, and in the middle of the affair people seemed to suddenly go mad. It was like a saturnalia, really—they began tearing off their clothes and capering about." He paused, eyeing Ada. "I trust I'm not offending you," he ventured.

"I think it's very offensive not to offer a lady the first drink," she said.

"Excuse me." Noodlemayer passed her the bottle. She gulped, shiv-

ered, and returned the diminished pint to her uncle, who drank quickly.

"You may not believe this," Noodlemayer continued, "But for a moment I thought I saw a pink elephant in the parade, too."

"Possibly." Professor Noid smiled vaguely. "Some of the students may have rented an elephant from the zoo and dyed it pink, you know."

"I know." Noodlemayer tipped the bottle again, smiling self-consciously. "But while I was looking at it, the beast disappeared. And that's when people began losing their clothes. It was like a Bacchic orgy."

"Speaking of Bacchus," Ada said, "Are you sure you weren't drinking *before* the parade, too?"

"Well—just a nip," Noodlemayer confessed. "I had about a pint or so of this stuff left over after preserving an alligator, and I hated to waste it."

"Alligator?" Ada shuddered and grabbed the bottle, downing another stiff drink. "Brrrr! A few slugs of this and I can understand why you saw pink elephants and naked people. You've got the d.t.s."

"Have I?" Noodlemayer asked. "But I feel quite sober, I assure you."

"No sober man sees pink elephants," the girl insisted. "Just thinking about them has driven me

to drink."

"Well, let's talk about it downstairs," the Professor said, hastily, eyeing Elmer as he endeavored to lead Dr. Noodlemayer from the room.

"But you were going to show me the results of your recent experiments," Noodlemayer protested. "You said something about a new machine and exciting advances in—"

"All a mistake," the Professor assured him. "I was drunk when I called you. As a matter of fact, I wish I were drunk now." Nervously, he reached for the pint bottle again, and took a final pull.

"Well, if you really feel that way about it," Noodlemayer beamed, reaching into his coat once more, "I just happen to have another bottle with me. You see, I actually preserved two alligators."

AT the sound of the word, Ada snatched the second bottle from his hands. She tilted it expertly.

Elmer, watching from the table in the corner, realized that all three of them were rapidly showing the effects of their hasty tippling. The Professor and Ada both drank to calm their apprehensions.

Once more the psychiatrist endeavored to lead Noodlemayer from the room. "Downstairs," he coaxed. "We can all relax and take

our shoes off."

"Please, no," Noodlemayer begged. "I don't want to see anything else removed this evening. I still am not sure if it was real or imaginary. Maybe your niece is right. I might have indulged too freely. Perhaps I should give up trying to preserve alligators."

Once more Ada grabbed at the bottle. "Must you talk about such loathsome things?" she asked. "Alligators and elephants — what next?"

Noodlemayer turned, a placating smile on his lips. It froze suddenly, then crept up under his mustache and disappeared. "W-what's that?" he gasped.

"What's what?"

"Over there — in the corner, on the table." He pointed a wavering finger. "Am I completely deranged, or do I see the body of an anthropoid?"

"Which question do you want answered first?" Ada began. But Noodlemayer walked over to the table and peered down at Elmer. Elmer promptly closed his eyes and lay still, trying not to breathe noticeably.

The Professor started forward, but it was too late. Noodlemayer reached down and prodded Elmer's chest with his finger.

"It *is* a real gorilla!" he exclaimed. "I'm not that drunk!"

"I wish you were," muttered the

Professor, despairingly.

"What did you say?"

"Now you went and spoiled it," Ada answered, quickly. "That's why we wanted to get you out of the room. We meant it as a surprise."

"It *is* a surprise," Noodlemayer agreed.

"No, you don't understand." Ada giggled in alcoholic inspiration. "You weren't supposed to see this for another two months yet. It was my uncle's idea."

"Was it?"

"Of course," Ada rattled on. "You understand how fond he is of you. So he decided to give you this gorilla for a Christmas present. Didn't you?"

Professor Noid nodded helplessly.

"We were talking it over, just the two of us, trying to think what kind of a gift would be useful to an anthropologist. And we decided a gorilla would be just the thing."

"Dandy," Noodlemayer agreed. "I've always wanted one."

"So we figured." Ada took a drink out of the bottle for added stimulation, and apparently found it. "Only we were going to wrap it up nicely in gift-paper and tie a big blue ribbon around it. What fun it would have been watching you opening your present and trying to guess what was inside! Wouldn't it have been?"

"I can't imagine anything more jolly," the Professor groaned, wrenching the bottle from her hands and ingurgitating rapidly. "A stuffed gorilla for Christmas — leave it to my niece to think up an appropriate sentimental remembrance. Of course, it's spoiled now."

Noodlemayer took the bottle, drank absently, and then sniffed. "It doesn't smell spoiled," he said.

"The gorilla? Of course not, because it's stuffed."

"Stuffed? What did you stuff it with?"

"Oh, all sorts of things." Ada waved vaguely. "We took it to a taxidermist."

Noodlemayer peered down at Elmer and his eyebrows wagged.

"I'm trying to classify it," he said. "Strange. The pectoral development is that of *gorilla beringei* or *uellensis*, but the zygomatic processes resemble *gorilla castaneiceps* or even *mayema*. I can't decide if it's a coastal or a mountainous specimen. Where did you get it?"

The Professor opened his mouth, but Ada broke in quickly.

"We raised it ourselves," she said. "From a chimpanzee."

"Impossible." Noodlemayer passed his hand over his forehead again. "You're just trying to confuse me."

"Here, have another drink," the

Professor said. "That ought to help."

NOODLEMAYER finished the bottle. Then he tapped Elmer's forehead. "Something wrong here," he declared. "Did you say you had this specimen stuffed by a taxidermist?"

"Of course."

"But the brute's forehead seems warm."

"Maybe the taxidermist lied to us," Ada suggested. "Maybe he only claimed to have stuffed it."

"Then it's just a corpse," Noodlemayer nodded. "And not long dead, either, I'd guess." He ran his hand down across Elmer's nose.

That was a mistake.

Elmer sneezed.

"Yow!" the anthropologist commented, flinching and drawing back. "It's alive!"

"Now really," the Professor told him. "Maybe you've had too much to drink, old man. Remember those d. t. s."

"But I heard it," wailed Noodlemayer. "I saw it wrinkle its black snout at me!"

"Take it easy," Ada soothed. "This ape is quite dead. Can't feel a thing." Smiling she picked up the empty pint bottle and brought it down across Elmer's forehead. "You see?"

"I see!" Noodlemayer's jaw

dropped as Elmer sat up.

"Hit me with a bottle, will you?" he growled. "A fine trick! And when the bottle was full, you wouldn't even come near me."

"It's alive — and talking!" Noodlemayer cried.

"I don't hear anything," said the Professor, innocently. He turned to his niece. "Do you, Ada?"

"Certainly not. Dr. Noodlemayer, you're blotto."

"Y-you mean to tell me you can't see it move?" The anthropologist shrank back against the wall, trembling. "Why, it's getting up — it's taking those clothes off the floor, putting them on — what kind of a monster do you have here? Is this the experiment you were telling me about?"

Ada stepped over to Elmer and hastily whispered in his oversized ear. "Lie down!" she breathed, hoarsely. "Now see what you've started?"

The gorilla shook its head. "I'm tired of lying down," he told her. "Tired of watching everybody else drink and have a good time. I'm leaving." Clumsily, it adjusted the clothes over its bulky body and knotted shoelaces with prehensile thumbs.

"Now *she's* talking to it," Noodlemayer wailed. "Listen, you can hear it!"

"Nothing of the sort," the Professor said. "Come downstairs and

let me fix you a nice drink."

But before the unnerved anthropologist could accept the invitation, the gorilla had blocked the doorway. The simian countenance leered incongruously above the clothing.

"W-where are you going?" Ada demanded. "You can't go out like this."

"Oh can't I?" Elmer answered.

"Just you watch and see. I'm through with your uncle and his tricks. Turn me into a gorilla, will he? All right, I'm going to enjoy myself before I vanish like that pink elephant."

"Come back!" Ada called. "I'll give you a banana."

But it was too late. Scraping his knuckles along the floor, Elmer disappeared down the hall.

"Now what?" whispered the Professor.

The girl sighed. "I don't know," she said. "You were saying something about giving Dr. Noodlemayer a drink. Let's all have one and try to think. Or not to think."

"I saw it," Noodlemayer insisted. "I saw it, I heard it. I'm going to phone the police!"

"First the drink, remember?" Professor Noid propelled the anthropologist out of the laboratory. "First the drink, and then you can call the police about the pink elephant and the gorilla and the naked alligators, or whatever you

think you saw."

"I-I'm so confused!" Noodlemayer groaned, as they descended the stairs.

"You aren't the only one." Ada halted at the bottom of the landing and surveyed the telltale evidence of the open front door. "And something tells me a lot of people are going to be still more confused before the night is over."

CHAPTER VII

AS the first step towards confirming her prediction, Elmer crouched in the doorway of a hamburger stand on Main Street. He was suddenly conscious of an overpowering hunger. Here it was, almost midnight, and he hadn't eaten dinner. All of this drinking and metamorphizing had stimulated his appetite; he had to eat.

Still, he hesitated. Gazing through the window, he discerned two couples seated at the counter of the hamburger joint. They were obviously college students, and he wondered how they would react to his appearance. Well, there was only one way to find out.

Squaring his shoulders and trying to walk erect, Elmer entered.

He seated himself at the counter, crouched low to avoid the gaze of the collegiate couples, who were engrossed in playing footie down at the far end. But he could not hope

to hide his countenance from the counterman.

That gentleman now stepped in front of him and opened his mouth to solicit an order. But when the counterman gazed into Elmer's hairy, bestial face, his jaws refused to function. So did the rest of him, which was just as well — for if he could have moved his legs, the counterman would have taken a running start for parts unknown.

As it was, he peered at the clothed gorilla in strangled silence. When finally he managed to articulate, all that came out of his mouth was a feeble, "Ulp!"

"What's that?" Elmer demanded.

"I said, 'ulp!', " the counterman declared. Then, as if realizing that this beast had indeed addressed him, he murmured, "So you can talk, too?"

"Why not?" Elmer wanted to know. "Doesn't everybody?"

"Only human beings," the counterman replied.

"Meaning I'm not one?" asked Elmer, menacingly.

"I—I didn't say that."

"Well, you'd better not," growled the ape-man. "Or I'll tear your head from your scrawny shoulders." He reached over and grasped the counterman by the collar. "I'm hungry," he rasped. "Bring me five or six hamburgers."

"Cooked or raw?" the counter-

man asked.

"Cooked, of course! What makes you think I'd eat raw meat?"

"Why — I dunno — I thought they served it at the zoo —"

Elmer gave him a shake that rattled the fillings in his teeth. "Are you insinuating that I come from a zoo?" he roared.

"Why, no, but—"

"I'm a student here at the university." Elmer told him. "I should think you could tell that by looking at me."

"Oh, sure. One of them backward students, huh? I —"

Another shake silenced the hapless counterman. "Never mind the conversation," Elmer thundered. "Hurry with those hamburgers."

Released, the counterman scurried away.

"No onions," Elmer called after him. "People who eat onions aren't popular."

"It would take a lot more than not eating onions to make you popular with me," the counterman declared, from the safety of the kitchen.

The altercation had attracted the attention of the two couples at the end of the counter, and all four were now staring curiously at Elmer.

"Do you see what I see?" demanded one of the girls of her escort.

"I'm afraid I do," that youth

sighed.

"It's an ape," the other girls said. "An ape in men's clothing."

"A square ape at that," said the second young man. "Nobody wears pink shirts any more."

"Since when did they accept gorillas as students at this university?" the first gal asked.

"I don't know," her escort puzzled. "Maybe Buster Gutz managed to get him enrolled so he could play on the football team."

The second girl squinted myopically at Elmer. "Are you sure it's a real gorilla?" she asked. "Maybe it's just somebody who needs a shave."

"If so, he needs one worse than anybody I ever saw," said the fourth student, earnestly. "But not as badly as I need a drink."

"I've got to find out about this," declared the first girl. She rose and approached Elmer.

"Excuse me," she began, "but just to settle a friendly argument — are you a man or a monkey?"

ELMER started to growl at her, then checked himself. Curious, this tendency to fly off the handle. Perhaps the Professor had been right about his Jekyll-Hyde theory. Elmer felt definitely brutal and aggressive. But common sense prevailed. He smiled, baring his fangs.

"I'm quite human," he said. "This is just a costume I wore to

the parade tonight."

"Of course!" The girl smiled. "We should have thought of that. My, it's quite realistic, isn't it? Where did you get all that hair from?"

"My girl friend's father runs a barber-shop," Elmer explained, glibly. "She saved the sweepings for me."

"Kind of her." The co-ed touched Elmer's hand. "I see you even had enough left over for your fingers."

"Oh, I'm covered with the stuff," Elmer said. "There was plenty to go around."

"Around what?" the girl wanted to know.

"Everything."

"She must have saved it for months and months."

"Saved what?"

"The hair. You know, this girlfriend you were telling me about."

"She did," Elmer asserted. "But then, it's an old habit of hers. She keeps boxes of it for souvenirs. Sort of an heirloom, you might say."

"Are you sure you're not kidding me, mister?" the girl asked him.

"Why should I kid you about a thing like that?" Elmer wanted to know. "Obviously I can't be a real gorilla. Real gorillas come from Africa — how would I be able to speak English?"

"I never thought of that," the

girl mused. "Not that I'd particularly care to."

"Here's your hamburgers." The counterman slid the plate down and retreated quickly. Elmer reached out and crammed a hamburger into his mouth — then another, and another. The girl watched him swallow them and her eyes widened.

The other three students gradually approached and peered at Elmer. He stopped midway through the fourth hamburger and regarded them intently.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Haven't you ever seen a man eat a hamburger before?"

"Not in one gulp," the second girl said. "And it isn't so much your manners — it's your teeth. Don't tell me those big yellow fangs are part of the costume, too?"

"Those big yellow what?"

"Fangs."

"You're welcome," said Elmer, hastily. But the girl was not to be diverted.

"I asked if those were your real teeth," she said.

"Certainly not!" Elmer snapped, consuming his fifth hamburger in the same gesture. "It so happens I have another girl-friend whose father is a dentist, and she saved me —"

He halted, conscious of the stares of the two males. "What are you looking at?" he demanded.

The college boys did not reply. They merely gestured helplessly at Elmer's feet.

HE glanced down and realized the source of their dismay. During the wait at the counter he had unconsciously kicked off his shoes, which were far too small for his apish toes and broad, wrinkled heels. Now the two nether paws were bare, curling around the bottom of the stool.

"T—that's no costume," one of the young men declared. "I don't care how many girl-friends you've got or what their fathers do for a living. None of them could have saved you toes like these!"

"Then it *is* a real gorilla!" the second girl exclaimed. "I knew it all the time." She headed for the door. "I'm getting out of here!" she announced, suiting the action to the words.

"Wait for us!" Her three companions followed hastily.

Elmer rose from the stool, tugging on his shoes. The counterman stared.

"They'll call the cops," he said. "So you'd better pay me, quickly, before the police get here."

"Nice reasoning," Elmer grated.

"Now look, you caused enough trouble," the counterman said. "How am I ever gonna live it down? Folks find out I been serving gorillas in my place, it'll get a

bad name."

"For the last time, I'm not a real gorilla," Elmer told him. "And that's the truth."

The counterman smiled bitterly. "What are you then?" he asked sarcastically. "I suppose you're going to tell me you're just an organ-grinder's monkey."

"Right," Elmer said.

"Who ever heard of an organ-grinder's monkey that size?"

"He had a pipe-organ," Elmer explained. "Now goodnight."

"Running off without paying, huh?" called the counterman.

"I'm not sticking until the police show up," Elmer said.

"Well, go ahead, then. I don't care. They're bound to catch you, anyway. Can't hope to escape unnoticed, the way you look. Which is, to put it bluntly, awful!"

The counterman ducked just in time as Elmer aimed the sugar-bowl at his head, then darted from the hamburger stand.

He peered up and down the street. The four students had disappeared from sight, but Elmer had audible evidence of their recent activity. The counterman had guessed correctly; they had turned in an alarm. For Elmer could hear the sound of sirens in the distance.

As they grew nearer, he hesitated and then started down the deserted street at random. He had to

find a place in which to hide, and quickly. There was no getting away from it; his hairy countenance was incapable of passing unnoticed.

Elmer ran along the curb, cursing softly as the pavement scraped his dragging knuckles. The sirens grew louder. He scanned the darkened store-fronts and headed for the nearest one as a flash of light down the street signalled the coming of a squadcar.

Crouching in the doorway, he debated his next move. Obviously there was only one thing to do. Gripping the handle of the store entrance, he crushed it beneath his powerful fingers. The lock yielded and he ducked into the shop, closing the door behind him just as the squadcar swept past.

He turned and blundered into the rear of the store. Oddly enough, in view of his recent conversation with the college-girl, he appeared to have hidden himself in a barbershop. A curtained doorway in the rear seemed to lead to the barber's living-quarters.

ELMER crept down the hall and into the back room. Sure enough, a baldheaded gentleman lay slumbering upon a cot. Elmer stared at him silently for a moment; then, struck by a sudden inspiration, switched on the light.

Being suddenly awakened in the

middle of the night to find a gorilla staring down at you is not necessarily the world's most enchanting experience. At least it did not seem that way to the barber, whose name was Al O'Pecia. His reaction was normal enough, considering the circumstances. Being bald-headed, his scalp stood on end.

"Get up!" Elmer ordered, in a deep growl. Mr. O'Pecia tried to crawl under the bedclothes. "Go away," he said, hoarsely. "I knew I never should have went and drank that last bottle of hair-tonic."

Elmer yanked the covers down. "Up!" he insisted.

"I'm dreaming," Al O'Pecia murmured. "I gotta be. Tell me I'm dreaming."

"Pinch yourself and see," Elmer advised. "On second thought, I'll do it for you."

His ape-like fingers tweaked the barber's nose.

"Yeowtch!" observed the barber, and got up, fast.

"What's the idea of breaking in here in the middle of the night?" he demanded.

"You're a barber, aren't you? Well, I need a shave."

Al O'Pecia rubbed his eyes and gazed at his strange visitor. "You can say that again, brother. I ain't never seen anyone who needed a shave worse." Then he shook his head. "But I don't open until nine in the morning."

"You're open right now," Elmer told him. "I can't wait."

"Look like you been waiting quite a long time." The barber searched for his slippers. "You look more animal than human, with all that fur."

"My mother was frightened by a yak," Elmer explained. "Or was it a hair mattress?" He watched the barber don a robe. "Never mind. Just don't ask any questions and I'll make it worth your while. You shave me the way I tell you, and there's ten dollars in it for you."

The barber's eyes narrowed. "Aha," he breathed. "Funny business, eh? You one of them escaped convicts or something?"

"I told you, no questions," Elmer said. "Ten bucks, in advance."

"Twenty," said the barber.

"What kind of a clip-joint are you running here?" Elmer asked. But he paid. And the barber shaved him as directed, although his hands trembled whenever he came in close contact with the brutish face.

The brutish face looked considerably less brutish, Elmer was pleased to note, once the barber had finished his work. A carefully scalloped hairline made Elmer resemble a crewcut collegian with a broken nose.

"Good enough," he told Al O'Pecia, "Now shave my hands." The barber did so, grumbling.

"I don't like this business," he said. "Something funny going on. You don't hardly seem human."

"I am, though," Elmer answered. "How I got this way would take too long to explain."

"I'll bet it's a hair-raising story," the barber ventured.

"It is," Elmer assented. "Now, if you're finished, I'll get out of here. You can go back to bed and forget anything ever happened."

"I may go back to bed," the barber declared, "but I doubt if I'll ever forget."

"One thing more," Elmer said, eyeing the barber's feet, which were extremely large. "I want a pair of your shoes."

"Anything," the man told him. "Just so you go away and stay away. Though why you need shoes in the jungle is beyond me."

Ignoring his grumbling, Elmer accepted a pair of oversize moccasins which fitted his feet perfectly.

Thus accoutred, he sallied forth again into the night. Oddly enough, despite the hectic events of the past six hours, he didn't feel tired. On the contrary, his hirsute body seemed filled with almost boundless energy.

ELMER paused before the shop, scanning the silent street. No squadcars were in evidence. The campus mall was deserted. He

moved along restlessly, his long arms dangling to the pavement. Crossing over to the wooded mall, he made a sudden decision. Why scrape his knuckles this way?

Reaching up, he grasped the branch of the nearest tree and swung himself aloft. The sensation was exhilarating. Elmer began to swing from tree to tree, Tarzan-fashion.

As he did so, he became acutely conscious of the change in himself. It was physical, yes; but more than physical. For the first time in his life, Elmer felt truly aggressive. More than that, he experienced a queer elation compounded of primitive urges. There was this impulse to beat his chest, roar, fight, seek a mate.

The voice of reason faintly told him he'd better take advantage of his shaven face and return to his boarding-house room and bed. Still he swung along restlessly, seeking he knew not what in the crisp silence of the night.

Delighted with his newfound agility, he swung higher and higher, seeking the topmost branches of the great trees. Thus his remote forebears might have travelled milleniums ago. The evolutionists were right, Elmer decided — there must have been apes in his family tree.

He hurtled past the second-storey windows of the faculty

houses lining the side of the campus. Most of them were darkened, and there was no danger of detection. When Elmer saw a light loom ahead, he ducked and hesitated. As he did so, he peered into the room to see if his progress might be observed.

But the occupants of the room were much too busy to look out of the window at this moment. In spite of the fact that Elmer no longer had any desire to be a peeping Tom, he paused and stared.

One of the occupants was well worth staring at. She was a tall, leggy blonde of generous proportions — said proportions being confined, at the moment, in only the sheerest of negligees. In his dual role of Jekyll and Hyde, Elmer found she appealed to his tastes as a gentleman and as an ape.

Oddly enough, the girl's companions in the room did not seem to share his sentiments. The two men appeared to be arguing with the blonde. Elmer squatted on the limb of the tree before the window and scrutinized them.

One of the men was tall, the other short; both were bearded. The tall man did most of the talking. He pounded on the vanity table and pointed at the blonde, who shook her head emphatically. The short man said something and again the blonde tossed her curls.

Then both men shrugged. The tall man stepped forward and took the blonde by the arm. As she tried to break free, the small man ran forward, holding something in his hand — something that flashed and glittered.

The blonde opened her mouth to scream, but the tall man's hand came down over her face as he held her. And the little man ran at her with his knife.

Had Elmer Klopp witnessed such a scene just six hours earlier, he would have fallen out of the tree in sheer dismay. But the Elmer Klopp of six hours earlier was gone. In his place was a powerful, ape-like figure spoiling for a fight.

He spoiled no longer. With a lunge, he swooped forward, kicking in the window-pane and swinging to the center of the room.

THE two men looked up. As the tall man released the blonde, she opened her mouth, but no scream came out — only a gasp, as Elmer went into action.

One paw brushed the knife to the floor. One paw grasped the big man by the collar. Then Elmer had them both by the beards. He banged their heads together expertly. Eyes rolling, they collapsed.

Growling deep in his throat, the ape-man dragged his victims to the window and casually tossed them

out. Then he peered down at the grass below.

Apparently unconsciousness had caused them to fall without any muscular tension, and the jar of landing revived them; neither man showed any signs of broken bones, but only a singular determination to get up and run off into the night. Elmer watched them disappear.

Then he returned to the middle of the room, stooped, picked up the knife, and hurled it out of the window.

"Silly idea, trying to cut you up," he grunted. "Couldn't they see there's enough of you to go around?"

"You don't understand," the blonde told him. "That wasn't what they had in mind at all."

"Then they were even sillier," Elmer said, eyeing her in frank admiration.

"You really think so?" she murmured, stepping forward.

Six hours ago, Elmer Klopp would have run out of the room as fast as his legs could carry him. Now, he merely took three steps forward, in the right direction. It may not have been the proper direction, but proper or improper, it brought results.

The blonde nestled against his barrel-chest and gazed up at him, her big eyes rolling soulfully. "You were magnificent," she said.

"Crashing out of the night, crushing their heads together. You reminded me of my first husband —"

"Never mind your first husband," Elmer suggested, kissing her.

"Whoo!" said the blonde, when at last she was able to free her lips. "It is strange. Your kiss, too, is familiar. My second husband —"

"Bah!" Elmer pushed her back. "This is no time for an autobiography."

The blonde tendered him a side-long glance. "You are so right," she murmured. "The hero deserves his reward." She swayed closer, and her hands caressed his neck. Elmer promptly switched out the light.

"So," the blonde giggled. "That is discreet. Sergei, my third husband, was also discreet,"

"How's this for discretion?" Elmer asked, suiting the action to the word.

But before the blonde could answer, footsteps sounded in the hall outside the bedroom door.

"Good Lord!" Elmer groaned. "Don't tell me that's your fourth husband arriving?"

"No," whispered the blonde, faintly. "You need not fear on that account. My fourth husband is dead."

"Good," Elmer told her.

"Not so good," the blonde responded. "I'm afraid the one outside happens to be my fifth."

CHAPTER VIII

DR. Hans Noodlemayer was a badly bewildered man. After Elmer's flight, he had permitted himself to be taken downstairs by Professor Noid and Ada.

The Professor and his niece saw to it that Dr. Noodlemayer imbibed several quick drinks in succession, nor were they remiss in following his example. By the time an hour passed, Noodlemayer was completely confused.

Once he had been quite sure that he'd seen people losing their clothing on Main Street. He believed he had witnessed the appearance and disappearance of a pink elephant. He thought he had discovered a talking gorilla in the Professor's laboratory.

But what with the liquor, and the frantic babbling of Ada and her uncle, he was no longer certain of anything. They had him almost convinced that these events were a figment of his imagination. One final stiff drink — a triple brandy, poured by the Professor — left Noodlemayer in a state where he could not distinguish between pre-conceptions and reality. And by the time he reeled out of the house, he was hopelessly muddled. He didn't know his assumptions from a hole in the ground.

In order to avoid holes in the ground — real or imaginary —

Noodlemayer walked very slowly. Once he thought he saw two bearded figures racing frantically through the tree-bordered campus, but he could not be sure. Nothing was right any more.

Noodlemayer shook his head. Ever since his last anthropological field-trip, a year ago, things had been strange. It was then, in Kirghiz, that he had met and married Sonia. Dear Sonia, with her exotic ways; her feline fancies. Like a cat, she preferred a nocturnal existence; like a cat, she was apt to claw and bite when unduly provoked. But even so, the late marriage had proved pleasant to Dr. Noodlemayer. The presence of a young and beautiful wife attracted many new friends to his home; almost every evening, while he worked on his papers, Sonia would entertain a coterie of students or unattached faculty members.

Yet Hans Noodlemayer had no reason for jealousy. For Sonia never seemed to retain the same admirers for long. A month or two and they vanished from the social scene, to be replaced by others.

Certainly she was devoted to his welfare. It was she who urged him to take certain steps for his own advancement on the faculty. It was she who suggested he make friendly overtures to Professor Noid.

As a matter of fact, Sonia seemed to know a great deal about

what went on behind the scenes at Hardnox.

"Why don't you find out what your friend the Professor is up to?" she had inquired. "I hear he's been working on some kind of experimental machine lately. Maybe it's something you could use in connection with your own studies."

That was what had prompted the friendship leading up to this evening's bewildering events.

Noodlemayer didn't know what to make of it. He glanced at his watch, noticed that it was after one o'clock. Sonia would still be up, of course. She usually remained awake until four or even five in the morning and dozed the day away. He could tell her what had happened, and perhaps she'd be able to explain. A clever woman, Sonia, with a surprising fund of knowledge at her painted, pointed fingertips.

Dr. Noodlemayer approached his house with renewed confidence, then halted as he realized that the lights were out. Sonia had retired, after all.

In that case, he decided, he'd enter quietly. He was careful about opening the door and cautious about closing it. He switched on the hall light and tiptoed softly up the stairs.

Then he heard the sounds coming from his wife's bedroom. Her voice, and another — a deep, mas-

culine voice.

Abruptly, confusion swept over Noodlemayer once more. Confusion, and alcoholic anxiety. After all, a man can take only so much without cracking. Naked women, pink elephants and garrulous gorillas had overloaded Noodlemayer's quota, and brandy tipped the balance. Now, the sound of the male voice issuing from his wife's boudoir was the final touch.

Everything had gone crazy, it seemed; there was nothing to do but follow suit.

WITH an oath, Dr. Noodlemayer plunged into his own bedroom and sought the bureau drawer. He emerged in a moment, brandishing a large revolver and sought his wife's room.

At the sound of his coming, the voices ceased. Without a word, he yanked at the doorknob. It did not yield; the door was locked.

"Sonia!" he cried. "Are you in there?"

"Yes, of course," his wife replied.

"Then open the door and let me in."

"Just a minute," Sonia said. "I'm busy."

"That's what I thought," her husband declared. "I knew I heard a man's voice."

"You heard no such thing," Sonia called. "If that's what you're

thinking, you're badly mistaken."

"If that's what I'm thinking, somebody is going to be badly mutilated," her husband told her. "I may as well tell you, I've got a gun here. Are you going to open that door now or do I have to shoot the lock off?"

There was the sound of murmuring from within, and then a heavy thump. After a moment, Sonia unlocked the door. She stood there smiling calmly at her irate spouse.

"Such a fuss!" she said. "Hans, what has gotten into you?"

"I might well ask the same question," her husband declared, stalking into the room and waving his revolver menacingly. He wheeled and faced her. "All right, where is he?"

"Where is who?"

"The man I heard talking to you," Noodlemayer shouted.

"You didn't hear a man," Sonia answered. "And for pity's sake, don't shout at me. You'll wake Aunt Olga."

"Aunt Olga?"

"Shh!" Sonia put her fingers to her lips. "She just arrived this evening, unexpectedly, from Kurdistan. She wanted it to be a surprise."

"It is," Noodlemayer asserted. "I didn't even know you had an Aunt Olga. I thought you told me you were just a poor orphan with

nobody in the world except four ex-husbands."

"Aunt Olga is a very *distant* relative," Sonia explained. "But she's close enough now. In fact, she's right over there in my bed, sleeping. The poor thing was so tired she dozed off the moment she hit the pillow."

Dr. Noodlemayer glanced at the bed and discovered it was indeed occupied; a huge figure curled beneath the covers, which were pulled up over the head.

He approached the bed slowly, flourishing his weapon.

"What are you doing?" Sonia cried. "Don't disturb her!"

"Why not?" her husband demanded. "I don't see why I'm the only one who should be disturbed around here. Besides, I don't believe you. Aunt Olga, indeed!"

Reaching out, he yanked the covers down swiftly, exposing a bulky body clad in one of Sonia's longest kimonas. The head of the reclining figure was swathed in a bonnet — the type women wear when they put their hair up in curlers as an excuse for repulsing husbandly advances.

"You see?" Sonia said, triumphantly. "It's not a man."

DR. Noodlemayer stared into the broad, brutal features, noting the splayed nostrils and jutting jaw. "It doesn't look like a

woman, either," he sighed. "In fact, as a qualified anthropologist, I must say your aunt doesn't seem to belong to any racial group I recognize. If her face wasn't hairless, I'd swear she'd resemble that gorilla I saw earlier this evening."

Sonia sniffed. "Hans," she murmured. "Have you been drinking, by any chance?"

"Not by any chance," her husband replied. "I was drinking on purpose. You'd drink too if you ran into a talking gorilla."

"Just where did you meet this gorilla, might I ask?"

"You might," he told her, "It was in the Professor's laboratory."

"Aha!" The blonde's eyes narrowed. "Just as I suspected —then he is up to something, after all. What is it?"

"I don't know. I'm terribly confused. After the gorilla escaped, they insisted that I drink with them. I forgot all about calling the police." Dr. Noodlemayer brightened. "Perhaps I had better do so now. Send out a general alarm."

Abruptly, the figure on the bed stirred and sat up.

Elmer had been lying there quietly, hoping that a glimpse of "Aunt Olga" might serve to satisfy the man. But now, at the mention of the word "police" he could contain himself no longer.

Striving to pitch his voice in a high falsetto, he blinked his eyes

and said "Sonia, my pet — who is this man?"

The blonde took the cue gracefully. "Why, Auntie, this is my husband, Dr. Noodlemayer."

Elmer extended a shaven paw. "Ah, this is indeed a great pleasure. Sonia has told me so much about you."

Noodlemayer took the paw and examined it with ill-concealed distaste. "I wish I could say the same," he replied. "She never told me a thing concerning you. You're here from Kurdistan, is that right?"

"Why, yes."

"Funny, you have no accent. Most Arabs find difficulty in mastering English."

"I'm not Arabian," Elmer explained, quickly.

"But the Kurds are an Arabic tribe."

"Perhaps Sonia should have explained to you that I'm not a true Kurd. I'm more of a Whey."

"Whey? I never heard of them. Yezidees, perhaps?"

"I really couldn't say," Elmer floundered. "I just got here tonight."

"That's so." Noodlemayer's gaze shifted around the room. "By the way, I don't see any bags."

"Why should you? I'll have you know I'm a highly moral woman. I wouldn't travel with any —"

"Luggage," Noodlemayer inter-

jected, hastily. "Where is your luggage?"

"Down at the station," Sonia said, shooting Elmer a warning glance. "I thought we could pick it up in the morning. That's why Aunt Olga is wearing my clothes."

"I see." Dr. Noodlemayer, in the course of his inspection, encountered a glimpse of the broken glass strewn on the floor beside the shattered window.

"What's this?" he snapped.

"Oh." Sonia hesitated. "I wasn't going to tell you, because I knew you'd just be upset. We had intruders this evening."

"Intruders?" Noodlemayer gripped his revolver. "Perhaps it was the gorilla on the prowl. Let me ring up the police —"

"No!" Elmer clambered out of bed. "They were harmless. Just a couple of travelling salesmen."

"Travelling salesmen?" Again Noodlemayer's gaze was suspicious. "How come you know so much about these things if you've just arrived from Kurdistan?"

"Well —"

"I don't mean to appear offensive, but might I look at your *visa*?"

"My *what*?" Elmer drew himself erect. "What a thing to ask a lady!"

"Your *passport*, I mean." Despite himself, Noodlemayer blushed.

"It's down at the station," Elmer explained. "But don't you want to hear about those salesmen? Like I say, they were really harmless. When we got tired of listening to them talk, I just threw them out of the window."

"You — threw them out — bodily?"

"How else?" Elmer pointed at the broken glass. "Then we locked the door, of course. A woman can't get her beauty sleep if a bunch of travelling salesmen keep wandering into the bedroom at all hours. Isn't that so, Sonia?"

"That's so," the blonde admitted. "My second husband was a —" Abruptly she bit her lip and fell silent.

NOODLEMAYER turned and confronted Elmer. "Excuse me," he said. "But did either of these travelling salesmen happen to wear a beard?"

"They both did," Elmer replied. "Great big bushy beards. Claimed to be selling cough-drops. Claimed to be brothers, said their name was Smith, something like that."

"Then you are telling the truth," Noodlemayer said, shaking his head in bewilderment. "I saw two men answering to that description, running along the campus as I came by."

"You see?" Elmer gave Sonia a triumphant grin. "That explains

everything doesn't it?"

"I guess so." Noodlemayer took his wife's arm.

"Come along, then," she said. "Let's not disturb poor Aunt Olga any longer." She winked at Elmer out of the corner of her eye. "Maybe I'll slip back for a moment later," she murmured. "Just to tuck you in."

"That will be, as you Americans say, just ginger-peachy," Elmer replied. "Good night, Dr. Noodlemayer."

"Good night," he answered. And then, "Good grief!"

"Now what's the matter?" Sonia asked.

"Explains everything, eh?" Noodlemayer muttered. "Aunt Olga from Kurdistan, is that it?" He pointed the revolver at the floor.

There, in a telltale heap, lay Elmer's discarded clothing.

Noodlemayer turned and confronted the former occupant of his wife's bed. "So you didn't want me to call the police," he grated. "Well, I can understand that, now. You're the one I've been looking for."

"Hans, what do you mean?" Sonia was genuinely puzzled.

"Mean?" Noodlemayer raised the revolver. "My dear, this is what I've been telling you about — the talking gorilla!"

Without a word, Elmer turned and sprinted across the room.

Noodlemayer raced after him, his foot coming down on the kimona. It ripped and gave — dropping to the floor and exposing the hairy, simian body.

Sonia screamed, Noodlemayer fired, and Elmer Klopp jumped out of the window.

CHAPTER IX

FORTUNATELY for Elmer the indignant husband's shot missed its mark. Also fortunately for Elmer, he was able to swing his way through the trees without detection or interception until he arrived at his boarding-house.

Everyone had long since retired, and he managed to sneak up to his room without incident. There he collapsed in bed. He was glad to be there, even though Sonia wouldn't show up to tuck him in.

A part of him regretted this fact greatly. Another part speculated on the possibilities of the same performance by Ada. Despite the obvious attractions of the blonde, there was something about the Professor's niece that caused Elmer to stir restlessly. He remembered her impudent face — and other things — issuing from the scanty protection of his coat after the wild ride on the pink pachyderm.

Good heavens, had all this really happened to him this even-

ing? Or was it all a product of alcoholic fancy? Perhaps he was still in the Professor's laboratory, imprisoned in that machine. Yes, that part might be true; Professor Noid could have invented this Psycho-pathfinder, or whatever he called it. And in subjecting himself to it Elmer was merely experiencing a seemingly lengthy and involved dream. Surely that was the sensible answer. All of the rest, including undraped females, bearded males, and his present state of apprehensive apedom, were figments of fancy. The pink pachyderm itself was just another example of the impossible — an elephantasy.

Yes, that must be the answer, Elmer decided. This was just a post-hypnotic stage of suggestibility. In the morning he'd wake up and find everything back to normal. Once more he'd be a nonentity in a drab but familiar world.

He sighed, sinking into slumber. For a moment he felt a curious twinge of regret. Crazy as it all seemed, the events of the evening had been oddly fascinating, in a way. It was going to be difficult being just plain Elmer Klopp again . . .

Difficult?

It was going to be impossible.

Elmer found that out when he opened his eyes the next morning. His first gesture was to run his hands down his body. What he en-

countered sent him staggering from the bed to the mirror. He gazed at himself with horrified dismay.

He was still an ape. And, at the moment, only a half-shaven ape, at that. The face that leered back at him from the glass was already covered with bristles.

Moving almost automatically, Elmer secured a razor. He shaved himself with the dubious aid of trembling fingers. Then he dressed, slowly and carefully.

Something, he told himself, had to be done. Today was Saturday. He suddenly remembered his duties: Hardnox was playing Pyro Tech this afternoon in the homecoming game, and it behooved Elmer to show up on the third-string bench. Elmer, however, didn't feel very well behooved at the moment. He felt bewitched, bothered, and quite logically, befurred.

No, he decided, he could never present himself to Coach Buster Gutz in his present guise, or disguise. For that matter, the police might even now be searching for someone answering to his description. And since nobody else in his right mind would answer to such a description, Elmer was in danger.

The thing to do was to seek out Professor Noid immediately and take another treatment. No matter what it turned him into, anything would be better than existence in

this anthropoid state.

So Elmer Klopp dressed very carefully indeed, and saw to it that he wore both a hat and a scarf before venturing out into the street.

The day was bright and sunny, and the late morning air stimulated his appetite. Well, no harm in that; he'd better pick up a bite before seeking out the Professor.

But no more *contretemps* with countermen, he resolved. Elmer entered a cafeteria, filled his tray, and shambled into a quiet corner. He ate hastily, but without attracting undue attention. Satisfied at the success of his performance and disguise, Elmer paid his check and hastened down the street leading to Professor Noid's home.

He was scarcely a block away when a large red limousine pulled up to the curb and somebody waved a beard at him.

"Come here," said a voice.

ELMER recognized the beard and was not impressed. He started to pass on, then thought the better of it. For something else was waving at him now—not a beard, but the muzzle of what looked very much like a Thompson sub-machine gun.

"Please come here," said the voice.

"Well, if you're going to be polite about it, yes," Elmer said. He walked over to the car, knuckles

dragging.

"Kindly step inside," the voice urged.

Elmer hesitated, eyeing the machine gun.

"Yes, do," urged a second voice. "Have you no civic pride? It wouldn't be nice to spatter a lot of messy blood all over the sidewalk."

This appeal moved Elmer strangely. It moved him right into the back seat of the red limousine, which promptly pulled away from the curb.

Elmer found himself staring at beard number two. Beard number one was driving.

"You're the two guys I ran into up in Sonia's room!" he exclaimed.

"Ran into? That's hardly the phrase," said beard number two, rubbing a bandaged head ruefully. "However, don't be alarmed, comrade. As you can see, I bear no malice."

"You bear a machine-gun, and that's just as bad," Elmer told him. "Would you mind telling me what this is all about?"

Beard number one replied. "There's nothing to it, really. We just have a little job for you to do."

"A second-storey job," added his companion, shifting the machine-gun in his lap.

"But why me?"

Beard number two eyed Elmer's body and shrugged. "You're good

at climbing," he observed. "Besides, there won't be any fuss if the Professor or his niece notice you come in."

"Professor Noid?" Elmer asked.

"He's the one with the machine, isn't he? Well, that's what we're after. Or what you're going to be after."

"Do you think I'd steal the Professor's machine for you?"

"I'm sure you will." Beard number two patted his weapon. "Our orders are to get that device any way we can."

"Orders? Who gave them to you?"

"Our leader, of course." Beard number two writhed into a smile, or a hirsuteable facsimile of same. "But that doesn't concern you. What concerns you is this machine gun."

"You can say that again," Elmer murmured, feelingly.

"Why should I? Once is enough." Beard number two nodded. "We'll park outside and you can climb up to the laboratory. There is reason to believe the Professor is not at home, so you probably won't be disturbed. You have just three minutes to bring us that machine. If not, we come in after it ourselves."

"And don't get any ideas about calling the police," cautioned the beard in the driver's seat. "If you do, you'll never live to give testi-

mony."

The red limousine pulled up to the curb before Professor Noid's house. "Here you go," said the second beard. "With all those trees, you won't be noticed from the street. But hurry up — three minutes is all you have."

Reluctantly, Elmer left the car. For a moment he considered trying to make a run for it. But the machine-gun was trained on his back. Besides, if he did escape, no telling what the bearded men might do. He quite believed that they'd blast their way into the house and take the Professor's Psychopathfinder by force, if necessary.

So Elmer made his way over to the trellis at the corner of the building and climbed it, hand over hand — or paw over paw. Halfway up, he shed his shoes for greater convenience. Looking back over his shoulder he noted the two beards wagging at him approvingly.

Then he reached the window of the laboratory and slid it open. A moment later he landed with a thump on the polished floor.

THE lights were on, and Elmer noted that the Psychopathfinder stood in its accustomed place, wires connected to the control panel against the wall.

He moved towards it, wondering vaguely if there was anything

he could do; any way of removing himself safely from his entanglement with the two beards. But nothing occurred to him. If they had been unarmed, he could easily have used his physical strength on them as he had last night, and broken their heads. However, now they had the machine-gun — and this was obviously no time to split hairs.

No, he had to steal the Psycho-pathfinder. The first step was to loosen the control panel from the wall —

He turned his head quickly as the door opened and Ada stepped into the room. The darkhaired girl was wearing a most becoming pair of lounging pajamas and a most unbecoming look of consternation.

"Who are you?" she gasped. "What are you doing here?"

Elmer spread his palms outward.

"Don't you recognize me?" he asked. "I'm Elmer Klopp."

The girl shook her head dubiously. "Impossible," she declared. "Elmer Klopp has a face like a rolled-up fur coat, and little piggish red eyes, and nasty long yellow fangs."

"But I *do* have little piggish red eyes, and nasty long yellow fangs," the young man protested. "The only thing is, I got a shave." He stepped closer. "Take a good look," he urged. "Notice how bestial I am." Acting on sudden inspiration,

he wiggled his toes at her.

"You're right," the girl smiled. "I've never seen anything quite so bestial and revolting. Oh, Elmer, darling — you're back." And she threw herself into his astonished arms.

"I've been so worried about you," she declared. "If you only knew! Thank heavens you're here — now you can wait for my uncle and take another treatment."

"Where is your uncle?" Elmer demanded.

"At a faculty meeting," the girl explained. "But he should return within an hour. Meanwhile, you and I can make ourselves comfortable." And she grabbed him in an embrace that made him extremely uncomfortable.

"Sorry," Elmer sighed. "I can't wait."

"But you have to wait — the treatment —"

"I'm not here for a treatment," he explained. "As a matter of fact, I can only stay long enough to steal your uncle's machine."

"Elmer, have you lost your mind?"

"I'll lose more than my mind if I don't obey orders," he muttered. Quickly, he outlined his encounter with the bearded men. Drawing her over to the window, he indicated the parked car below. She nodded in comprehension.

"Let me call the police right

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posit two patrolmen on the curb, then continued up the street, giving chase to the other car.

Elmer stopped his descent, permitting his paws to pause. A shout from the street assailed him.

"Hey, you!" barked one of the patrolmen, menacing. "Come on down offa there. You're under arrest!"

"But I can explain," Elmer called. "I'm really not stealing anything. It's all part of the act — just you ask the lady inside the house about it and she'll tell you."

"Ain't interested," the patrolman grunted. "Burglary's not my department. I'm in Traffic."

"What's that got to do with me?" Elmer asked.

"Wasn't you with those guys in the red limousine?"

"Yes, but —"

"Then come along without making no trouble. Mebbe next time you won't make the mistake of trying to pull a robbery when you're parked next to a fire hydrant."

CHAPTER X

JJUDGE Spleen was in an ugly mood. It fitted him like a glove, for the little magistrate generally enveloped himself in an aura of incipient anger.

But this noon the Judge was even more enraged than usual. It

was almost one o'clock and the day was Saturday. He had planned on attending the homecoming game between Hardnox and Pyro Tech, and was the proud possessor of two seats on the fifty-yard line.

Instead he found himself occupying a single seat on the bench — and the judicial bench, at that. A steady stream of traffic violators had been flowing through his courtroom all morning, and the end was not yet. Judge Spleen was hungry, and he was confused. For hours now he had been dealing with freak accidents resulting from last night's homecoming parade and rally. The stories he had heard upset him greatly — weird accounts of pink elephants, and people losing their clothing; with resultant loss of control at the wheel.

For the twelfth time a prisoner was telling him the same absurd tale. "I was just driving along doing thirty, your honor, when I look up and I see this big pink elephant crossing the street in the parade ahead of me. I started to slam on the brakes when all of a sudden it disappears. And then, believe it or not, my clothes drop off —"

"I don't believe it!" snapped Judge Spleen, banging down his gavel. "Thirty dollars or thirty days."

"Give me the thirty dollars," said the prisoner, hopefully. "I can

use the dough."

"Lock him up!" grated the Judge. "This is the last straw."

But his statement was unduly optimistic. For at that moment, the two patrolmen ushered Elmer down the aisle.

The young man was not struggling. He had gone through that particular stage several minutes ago, to no avail; at the moment he was merely resigned.

Apparently the red limousine had eluded the pursuing squad-car; eventually the latter had returned to transport Elmer and the cylinder to court. All the way down Elmer had protested, urging the patrolmen to contact Ada and trying to explain the circumstances. His only response had taken the usual form — "Tell it to the Judge."

Gazing up at the little magistrate's rubicund countenance, Elmer wondered if it would do any good to tell this man anything. He glared down over the rostrum and transfixed Elmer with an envenomed stare.

"What have we here?" Judge Spleen demanded.

"Traffic violation, your honor," said the first patrolman. "Parking in front of a fire hydrant."

Judge Spleen's face relaxed into a snarl of relief. "Thank goodness!" he breathed. "For a moment I was afraid it might be another one of

those affairs involving pink elephants and naked women. I've been listening to those stories all day, and I'm sick of naked women and their tales."

"Beggin' your pardon," said the second patrolman; a rookie new to the force and to the Judge's chambers. "But naked women don't have tails — at least not the ones I've seen. Maybe you're thinking of monkeys."

"I was not thinking of monkeys," Judge Spleen observed. "I was thinking of having you suspended from the Force. For your information, I hate all animals, including pink elephants. And monkeys most of all."

ELMER listened to this tirade and any expectations of mercy faded. Judge Spleen appeared to be in no mood to listen to reason, let alone anything else.

"Now let's have the facts," growled the magistrate. "And only the facts. Where did this violation occur?"

"Over on main Street, just a few minutes ago. In front of Professor Noid's house, it was."

"What was?"

"This big red limousine. Parked right smack in front of the fire hydrant."

Judge Spleen relaxed. This looked like a cut-and-dried case. He gazed at Elmer and muttered,

"Very well, then. What do you plead — guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, your honor." Elmer faced his two captors. "You know very well I wasn't in the car while it was parked."

"Weren't you the driver?" the Judge demanded.

"Matter of fact, he wasn't," admitted the first patrolman. "Two other fellas were in the car."

"Then why didn't you bring them in?"

"Because they got away," the patrolman explained. "But don't worry, that red limousine ought to be easy to spot — on account of it's got a machine-gun sticking outta the rear window."

"Machine-gun?" Judge Spleen wasn't relaxed any more. "What in heaven's name —?"

"I suppose they was coverin' this guy," the patrolman continued. "Seein' as how we caught him climbin' down the trellis of the house."

"What were you doing on the trellis?" Judge Spleen wanted to know.

"I was stealing this." Elmer indicated the bulky cylinder which had been wheeled into the courtroom by two more of the squadcar's crew.

Judge Spleen looked at Elmer, and then at the cylinder.

"Go on," he said, in a subdued voice. "Tell me what it is. I want

to know what you and your machine-gunner friends were after."

"Why, it's really nothing at all," Elmer said. "Just a little old hi-fi low pass vacuum-precipitated ten-lamination acetate bonded orthoflow telekinesis booster tank circuit. That's all."

"That's quite enough," the Judge murmured. "Might I ask what it's good for?"

"Nothing," Elmer explained. "You see, those men in the car were really after the Psychopathfinder. They kidnapped me at gun point and made me steal it. I was going to fool them. No sense in letting them have the real Psychopathfinder — no telling what they might do with it. Already caused enough trouble dreaming up a pink elephant and undressing all those women."

The moment he uttered this last remark, Elmer was sorry. For Judge Spleen let out a strangled gasp.

"No!" he said. "Not *that* again! Are you trying to tell me there actually was such a creature, and that these women were stripped by mechanical means?" He peered over the bench. "Just who are you, anyway?"

"Elmer Klopp. I'm a sophomore here at Hardnox."

"You were," the Judge agreed. "But if this theft charge isn't cleared up, there'll be a lapse of

several years before you ever manage to become a junior."

Judge Spleen stared hard at Elmer. "Are you quite certain you're just a college student?" he asked. "Your face is anything but youthful."

"I worry a lot," Elmer explained.

"You should." Judge Spleen watched the young man as he stood scratching diligently. "Must you do that?" he asked.

"I've got to," Elmer told him. "Nobody else will do it for me."

"Can't blame them. I'd hate to get within ten feet of you." Judge Spleen wrinkled his nose. "I'm inclined to believe you're in with that gang of thieves, whoever they are. There's a hard look about you — I can recognize a criminal when I see one." Again the Judge stared, then flinched. "You're barefooted!" he cried. "What is the meaning of coming into this courtroom in your bare feet?"

"Left my shoes back at the house," Elmer said, truthfully. "Easier to climb without them."

JUDGE Spleen gazed at the anthropoid toes. "How horrid," he murmured. "How extremely horrid! Climbing with your toes, like a monkey. Let's dispense with all this nonsense about a trial — I couldn't stand listening to your testimony, if this is any sample. Tell you what; why don't you just

throw yourself on the mercy of the court and let me give you ten years at hard labor?"

Elmer took a deep breath. "You can't sentence me at all," he declared. "It's illegal."

"How do you arrive at that conclusion?"

"Because I'm not a human being," Elmer announced, triumphantly. "I'm a monkey." He pointed. "Look at my toes."

Judge Spleen sputtered, like a fuse reaching the point of explosion. "I don't want to look at your loathsome toes," he choked. "And I don't want to hear any more of your disgusting lies."

"All right," Elmer said. "If you won't believe me, what about this?" Dramatically, he ripped open his shirt and exhibited his hairy torso.

It had been his desperate intention to divert the Judge from passing immediate sentence, and in this he succeeded. At the sight of his chest, Judge Spleen became incapable of passing anything — except, perhaps, out.

He stared at Elmer and uttered little strangled gasps. The two patrolmen and the clerk of the court likewise goggled.

"Holy homicide!" gasped one of the policemen to his companion. "Did you ever see the like? Only two in the afternoon, and he's got five o'clock shadow all over!"

"Sure looks like an ape," the other agreed. "Unless he's been taking baths in hair-restorer."

"Well?" Elmer demanded, looking up at the maddened magistrate. "Now do you believe me, or shall I take off my trousers, too?"

"No — not that!" Judge Spleen held up both hands. "In all my years on the bench I've never seen anything like this before; I only pray that I never will again. Did I understand you to say that you are some sort of simian?"

"A gorilla," Elmer answered. "Listen!" He proceeded to beat on his chest and roar.

"Stop that!" screamed Judge Spleen, bringing the gavel down on the desk, and one of his thumbs. "This puts us in a pretty pickle. I don't know whether to sentence you to jail or to twenty years in the local zoo. Perhaps I'd better call upon competent authority to assist me. Dr. Noodlemayer, up at the University, could assist me. He's an anthropologist."

"I know," Elmer said. "I was in bed with his wife last night." He blushed hastily and added, "Oh, it's not what you're thinking. I was disguised as a woman at the time."

"This gets worse and worse," one of the patrolmen muttered. "From that last remark, the ape ain't even normal."

"Maybe it's a chimpansy," said

the other patrolman, unhelpfully.

"Quiet!" cried the Judge. "Let me call Noodlemayer."

"Why don't you call Professor Noid?" Elmer asked. "He's the one who knows all about this affair. He can restore me to my normal shape —"

"What is that?" Judge Spleen asked, sarcastically. "A pink elephant?"

"I can explain that to you, too, if you'd only listen," Elmer protested. "I'd be glad to tell you about undressing all those women, too."

Judge Spleen held his head in his hands. "One more word," he announced, "and I'll clear this courtroom. I only wish I had that machine-gun here to do it with!"

As if in answer to his prayer, the door at the far end of the court flew open. Down the aisle came the two bearded men; the taller one carrying the sub-machine gun.

"Don't anybody move!" he shouted. "Up with your hands, all of you!"

His companion observed the frozen tableau, then noted the bulky cylinder resting on a table near the front of the room.

"There it is," he said. "I've got it."

He ran over and lifted the huge tanklike apparatus. Slowly, the two bearded men retreated up the aisle.

"Robbed in my own courtroom!" the Judge sobbed. "Isn't anybody

going to do something?"

One of the patrolmen reached for his holster. Immediately the machine-gun chattered. So did the Judge's teeth, as he dived under the bench. The clerk and the second patrolman scrambled frantically for positions of safety on the floor as the shots sprayed the ceiling above.

Elmer sprinted for the side of the room. His first thought was to take cover; then he realized that the bearded men were hastening out of the courtroom.

At the same time he noted his own proximity to an open window. For the second time in less than twenty-four hours he prepared to jump to the ground below. Closing his eyes, he leaped, bracing himself against the moment when his feet would strike the hard pavement.

It was not the hard pavement he struck, however, but something quite a bit softer.

Opening his eyes, he gazed down in surprise. "Ada!" he exclaimed.

"That's right," said the girl calmly. "Would you mind taking your toes out of my midriff?"

CHAPTER XI

ELMER obliged and assisted the young woman to her feet. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Listening to you and that old

paranoic through the window," she explained. "He's somewhat of a manic-depressive, you know."

"He sure depressed hell out of me," Elmer replied. "But why didn't you come in?"

"I intended to. Then I saw those two thugs drive up and climb out with their machine-gun, and thought the better of it. You see, the Professor is with me, too; around the corner in our car. He has the Psychopathfinder and the panel control board equipment with him."

"How come?" Elmer wanted to know.

"Well, when he came home, I told him what had happened. Naturally, our first thought was to come down and rescue you. But in view of the circumstances, my uncle didn't think it safe to leave the Psychopathfinder behind and unguarded. So he dismantled it and took it along in the car." Ada smiled. "Setting it up again is no problem," she explained. "All you really need is a wall-plug."

"Well get me to one, quick," Elmer said. "I'm tired of monkeying around."

Ada led him across the lawn to the parked automobile. Professor Perry Noid saluted him from the front seat. In a few words his niece explained the happenings in the courtroom.

The Professor hastily applied

his foot to the starter. "Better get out of here before they start looking for our friend," he said.

"You mean the police or those thugs?" Elmer asked. "I don't seem to be popular with either."

"The thugs won't bother you, I guess," Ada remarked. "Not as long as they think that cylinder is the machine they're looking for."

"But where did they hear about it?" Elmer wanted to know. "And what on earth do they want with it?"

"We'll find that out in due time," the Professor suggested. "Meanwhile, where's a safe place for us to go and administer another Psychopathfinder treatment?"

"What about my room at the boarding house?" Elmer suggested.

Ada shook her head. "That's the first place they'll go to look for you," she reminded him. "Our place isn't safe, either."

"Well, there's nowhere else —" the young man began. Then he glanced at his companion's wrist-watch and brightened. "Of course, there is!" he exclaimed. "The stadium!"

"Stadium?"

"I was supposed to be there two hours ago. Don't you remember the homecoming game? It's going on right now, and I'm on the third team!"

"You mean we should set up our

apparatus on the field?" inquired Professor Noid, doubtfully. "Wouldn't that interfere with the other players?"

"Certainly not," Elmer told him. "We can do it in the dressing-room. Plenty of electrical outlets there, and we won't be disturbed."

"Come on, then," Ada urged. "Let's get going before something else goes haywire." Her uncle obediently headed the car in the direction of the stadium on the outskirts of town, while Elmer adjusted his clothing and recited his recent adventures. He told of encountering the bearded men in Sonia Noodlemayer's bedroom and went on from there; discreetly omitting the blonde's amorous advances from the narrative.

"But what puzzles me," Elmer concluded, "is what those two men want with your machine. Who are they, and why were they threatening Mrs. Noodlemayer?"

"I don't understand," the Professor sighed. "Ever since you came into my life, things have been very confusing for me."

"Ever since I came into *your* life?" Elmer retorted. "That's a fine way to put it! I didn't come into your life to begin with — I was dragged into it by this scheming hussy, here."

"Who's a hussy?" Ada demanded.

"You are," Elmer said, kissing

her. "And between you and your uncle, I'm the one who's really confused. Sometimes I think it's all more than I can handle; I feel like I'm about ready to fly off into a dozen directions at once."

THE Professor eyed him sharply. "Watch that, young man," he said. "I warn you that a split personality is a very difficult condition to deal with."

"It can't be worse than being a gorilla," Elmer insisted.

"Well, cheer up, you won't be a gorilla much longer," Ada comforted. "And I, for one, will be very happy to see you change. Right now, hugging you is like trying to make love to an animated fur coat."

"Don't talk about it," Elmer begged. "Now that I stop and look back at what I've been through, I feel as if I'm going to pieces."

"Get hold of yourself," the girl said. "Everything's going to be fine. You'll see."

Everything, however, was far from fine at the stadium. As they passed the structure they listened in vain for sounds of cheers from the Hardnox half of the audience. All of the yelling seemed to be coming from the Pyro Tech rooters.

Cranning her neck, Ada caught a glimpse of the scoreboard as they circled around to the dressing-

room entrances.

"Almost half-time," she announced. "Two minutes to go."

"And the score?" Elmer inquired.

"20 to 0, in favor of Pyro Tech."

The young man groaned.

"Cheer up," Ada said. "If you take your treatment, maybe the coach will let you play in the second half."

"He wouldn't let me play anything but tic-tac-toe on the bench," Elmer grumbled. "I'm on the third team. That's one step below being water-boy. Besides, you don't know Buster Gutz. Even though I don't get a chance to play, he's liable to kill me for not showing up on schedule." Again he sighed. "Is it my fault I can't be in two places at once?" he asked.

"Don't bother your head about it," the Professor soothed. "All you need is a treatment. Here, I'll park and you can help me carry the equipment in. Ada, grab those rheostats."

The apparatus-laden trio staggered into the Hardnox locker rooms and deposited their burdens. Swiftly, the Professor set up the panel control, plugging in and adjusting his wiring. He placed the Psychopathfinder on a bench around the corner near the showers and tested various dials and levers.

"Seems to be working," he said. "It's drawing power properly."

"Good!" Ada said. "Now, Elmer, if you want to step over there —"

"I do," he answered, emphatically.

"Then what's keeping you?"

The young man glanced at the door. "Can't you hear?" he whispered. "The team's coming in. The half must be over."

Sure enough, footsteps sounded outside.

"Now what do we do?" the girl asked.

"Duck into the showers here," Elmer suggested. "They won't come around the corner. Chances are they'll never notice the machine, either, here in the shadows. Half-time is just fifteen minutes; then they'll go out again and we can continue."

Quickly they sought the shower-stalls and huddled silently as Buster Gutz led his weary warriors in from the fray.

He was asking questions.

"#%&'()*!?" he inquired. "What the c@%6%!!! is the matter with you \$&!½@???" he demanded. "Can't any of you —%&—)c!!! tell your \$#/!!! from a ?:) (%!???"

Elmer blushed. "Pep-talk," he explained to Ada, in a whisper. "He's famous for them."

"He should be," replied the girl,

emphatically.

BUT there was not much pep in Buster Gutz' talk this afternoon. Reverting to the English language for a time, he spoke in tones of mournful discouragement Elmer had never heard before. The first team, apparently, had suffered heavy casualties during the first two quarters of the game. Seven of the regulars were out of the line and into the infirmary. Half of the second team had been tossed, trampled and trodden upon, and the coach was rapidly running out of his third-string reserves. Pyro Tech had outpassed, outpunted, outblocked, outrun, and outraged Hardnox, and with a full half of the game yet to play the prospects were grim.

"I'm not asking you guys to win," the coach concluded, wearily. "All I want now is you should try and protect yourselves. It would be one #\$\$%*('c!!! of a note if we ended up the game without having eleven men left to stagger around on the field." He sighed. "/?&!!!" he remarked. "The way things are, I'd even put in Elmer Klopp if he was here!"

At this indication of their coach's total despair, the team groaned in unison.

Not so Elmer. Hearing his name mentioned in connection with playing was too much for the young

man to bear. Momentarily forgetting his condition, he started out of the showers and rounded the corner.

"Here I am, coach," he said, brightly. "Did you say you wanted to put me in?"

"Who the \$—#!)&!!! are you?" Buster Gutz demanded, eyeing the shaven anthropoid with singular distaste. "Not that I care. I wouldn't want to put you into anything but a cage."

"I'm Elmer Klopp," the youth announced, brightly.

"A likely story." Buster Gutz gazed wonderingly over the bulky body with its dangling arms. "You sure don't look like him."

"But I am, really." Elmer halted, conscious that the other was scrutinizing his obviously altered appearance. "I see you can notice the difference. That's the reason I'm late, you know," he improvised. "I was trying to build myself up, improve my physique."

"How?" asked the coach, skeptically.

"I was taking a muscle course."

"Well, send the muscles back and get them to refund your money," Buster Gutz advised. "You look terrible. What makes your arms so long?"

"Maybe I overdid it a little," Elmer hazarded. "I took all fifteen of the lessons in one day."

"&" $\frac{1}{4}$ c/!!!" declared the

coach. "You're not Elmer Klopp. You can't fool me. I'd recognize his face anywhere. Yours is different — all ape-like and coarse—featured. Klopp's face isn't like that."

"Thanks," said Elmer.

"No," the coach continued. "Klopp's face isn't like that at all. He looks more like an anemic jackass with the heaves." Buster Gutz turned his back. "Probably those '&%%* $\frac{1}{4}$ c/!!! from Pyro Tech planted you here, hoping I'd put you in and get the team disqualified. Well, go back and tell 'em it didn't work."

"But I'm Elmer," the young man protested. "And if you'll just wait here, I can fix it so that I won't look different any more. Will you put me in, then?"

"I'll put you in a straightjacket if you don't stop bothering me," Buster Gutz promised, rejoining his battered gridders.

Elmer hurried back to the showers.

"Come on," he murmured to the Professor. "Never mind waiting. Give me a treatment now. I want to play the next half."

"But Elmer, that's dangerous —"

"I don't care," he said. "You don't understand what this means to me. I've been a nobody all season long. This is probably the only chance I'll ever get. If you're so

interested in improving my personality, you'll realize how important the game is."

"He's right," Ada added, unexpectedly.

"I don't like it," the Professor demurred. "For one thing, he's too upset right now for a treatment. The subject should be calm, relaxed —"

"I am calm!" Elmer gibbered. "If I was any more relaxed, I'd explode in a million pieces! Hurry up before I come apart at the seams! Don't you see, my whole self is wrapped up in playing this game? If you won't treat me, I'll crack up!"

"All this talk of split personalities is dangerous." The Professor twiddled his goatee, then rubbed his hands together insipidly. "Very well," he sighed. "Step over to the machine here. But I won't answer for the consequences."

COACH Buster Gutz was trying to make up for lost time. In the ten minutes remaining during the half-period, he decided to crowd a full hour of inspirational profanity. His voice rose from the huddle near the door, effectively drowning out all sounds of the Psychopathfinder's drone. It muffled the continuing noises, too — the sudden gasps of surprise from Ada and the Professor, and the

gasps from Elmer, too. These gasps — and further drones — continued for quite a time.

Finally there was silence.

Elmer Klopp ran across the room and tapped Coach Gutz on the shoulder.

"Here I am," he said. "Just as I promised. Now can I play?"

The coach wheeled abruptly. "Well I'll be —" He paused. "Yeah, it's you, all right. If I had time, I'd ask you to explain this nutty business, but I haven't. Maybe you can tell me when you're sitting on the bench out there."

"But you said I could play —"

"Hah!" Buster Gutz pointed the finger of scorn. "And just what position do you think you could fill?"

"All of them," Elmer said.

"All of them?"

"Quarterback, halfback, fullback, guard — the works!"

"Oh, fine! Now my troubles are over!" The coach exercised the muscles in his jowls. "I suppose I can just tell everybody else to go home and let you take over the job for the whole team."

"Exactly," Elmer beamed. "I've subdivided."

"Subdivided?"

"Split my personality. The Professor was worried about it. Apparently the last conscious wish before the treatment influences the

results. I wanted to be a lot of people, see? That's the way it is with a schizoid sometimes. Very simple."

"You certainly are," Buster Gutz commented. "Now get out of here with your crazy double-talk and let me alone."

"But you need me," Elmer said. "I'm your team. Or rather, *we* are." He turned his head in the direction of the showers and called, "Come on, boys."

Ten more figures sprinted from the shower stalls and lined up next to Elmer.

"No!" groaned Buster Gutz.

"Why not?" asked Elmer. Or one of the Elmers, rather — for there were now eleven unreasonable facsimiles of same.

The team gazed at this astonishing assortment in a sort of bruised bewilderment. As for their coach, he clutched his head in dismay.

"Which one of you guys is the real Elmer?" he wheezed.

"All of us," they chorused. "We're like the Three Musketeers, remember? All for one and one for all. Or was it the Four Horsemen? Or Seven Brides for Seven Brothers?"

"Shut up, the lot of you!" Buster Gutz stormed, recovering his customary lack of poise. "And get out of here!"

"Only five minutes to go," said

one of the Elmers. "We'll have to put on our uniforms."

"You can't play," the coach wailed. "It's—it's illegal!"

"Why?" asked an Elmer on the far end. "We're all the same person, actually. A collective entity. Professor Noid says he wants to write us up."

"Let him write you up if he likes," said the coach. "I don't care if he blows you up, for that matter. But you can't play. When you were one man, you were no good. What makes you think eleven of you will be anything but eleven times worse?"

"Because we'll confuse hell out of the other team," the Elmers chorused. "Besides, we won't have to call signals, since each of us knows what the others are thinking. It's all one big thought, really."

"And a damned screwy one," the coach added, emphatically. He paused and scratched his head. "Still, I duuno. You got a point there, about confusing the other team. Sure confused *this* team, I'll say that for you." He pointed at his warriors. The Hardnox eleven, known for some strange reason as the Irate Irish, had finally comprehended that this was not a hoax. They were indeed staring at an eleventuplet Elmer — and none of them liked it. Several of

the more game-weary members of the squad had fainted as realization dawned on them, and the rest were pitifully unnerved at the spectacle.

Buster Gutz grimaced grimly. "Well, all right," he said. "You can call your own plays. Anything goes, now. At least the longer you're on the field, the less time the opposition will spend in crippling my regular players. Get yourself into uniforms and decide which part of you plays which position. Only three minutes until the slaughter — I mean, until the second half."

"Thanks," said the all-male chorus.

ELMER went into action. Twenty-two arms and twenty-two legs flashed and flickered. It was bewildering to control all of this movement simultaneously; all the more bewildering because he *was* controlling it. For the first time, Elmer realized something of the sense of alienation which accompanies true aberration; seeing out of twenty-two eyes at once, from every angle, gave him a fresh and distorted perspective.

When he had come out of the machine—in sections—he'd been first frightened, then puzzled, then astounded. He'd stood there watching a duplicate of himself emerge; then the duplicate added

to his identity and the two of them had watched a third come forth, and then the trio had watched a fourth, and so on.

But fright, puzzlement and astonishment gave way to purpose; Elmer elevenfold had that much more confidence and power. He, in his multiple manifestations, kept dressing his various bodies—while in the background Professor Noid numbed vague references to multi-levelled perception, and repeated over and over again a meaningless phrase which sounded like, "Baby is Eleven."

As for Ada, she rapidly became rapt at the spectacle of her multiplied man. When the Elmers finally lined up for a last-minute inspection, the girl moved forward and hurled herself into the nearest pair of arms.

"I'm so proud of you, darling," she whispered. "Take care of yourself."

Elmer Number One kissed her fervently."

"Hey, what about me?" demanded his nearest counterpart.

"I'm just as much Elmer as he is."

Elmer Number Two now bussed her soundly, and in a moment she was being omnibusSED.

"Whooey!" gasped the blonde, reeling from the end of the line. "I'd hate to imagine what it would

be like to be married to you guys."

"Might be fun," the Elmers ventured.

"Not for me," the girl declared. "I'm thinking of all that cooking."

"Break it up!" commanded the coach. "Save your tackling for the other team."

"Wait for me," Elmer urged.

The girl nodded. "We'll be here," she promised. "You'll have to pop right back into the machine, all of you, once the game is over. The Professor says he's worried about the effect of all this multiple sensation on you."

Elmer was not worried in the least. Any effect of multiple sensation on him was nothing compared to the effect of him on the waiting crowd in the stadium.

As he trotted out on his twenty-two legs, a roar went up from the crowd. At a distance, his facial similarities weren't noticed at first, but his height was uniform and there was something oddly disconcerting about the single rhythm of his almost centipedal walk.

Then, as a bewildered announcer read the hastily-scribbled lineup of substitutions, there was multiple sensation indeed.

"For the Irate Irish," that worthy began. "Klopp for Wiznezovitch at right tackle . . . Klopp for Bolesoupsky at left

guard . . . Klopp for Stankopolitz at center . . . Klopp for Yifnifowskows at quarterback . . . Klopp for heaven's sake, what is this anyway?"

And that's what they all wanted to know . . . the crowd, the members and coaching staff of the Pyro Tech team, and the field officials.

THREE was a hurried hassle down at the fifty-yard line, but Coach Gutz and eleven arm-waving Elmers prevailed. "One man." Buster Gutz insisted. "Regular member of the third-string team. Sure, it's a trick, but you can let the doc check him; take his fingerprints if you like. You'll see it's the same guy . . . no, I don't know how he did it . . . none of your business, anyway . . . whaddya mean I'm crazy? . . . all right, then, just show me a rule that says the same man can't play all the positions — if he isn't in one body, that is . . . show me the rule or shuddup . . ."

In the end, Elmer took the field.

Amidst a howl from the crowd on both sides, the game started. And the howling never ceased.

Elmer Klopp in the singular was never a good football player. But Elmer Kloop in the plural, although unimproved, was now more singular than ever in his special way. His prediction had proved

to be correct; the Pyro Tech players couldn't get used to the idea of seeing his face and body multiplied elevenfold. Everywhere they turned, there was the selfsame Elmer Klopp, grinning amiably at them.

Elmer Klopp kicked off. A Pyro-Tech man caught the ball on his own twenty-seven yard line, only to be tackled by Elmer Klopp, while two more Elmer Klopps piled on top with lusty enthusiasm. On the second play, Pyro Tech fumbled, and Elmer Klopp waltzed down the field while Elmer Klopp ran interference for him and another trio of Elmer Klopps took out the opposition. When Elmer Klopp was about to be tackled after a gain of thirty yards, he merely threw the ball to himself and continued romping for a touchdown. Then he held the ball and kicked the extra point, while nine more of him cheered lustily.

And so it went. By the end of the third quarter the score was 37-20 in Hardnox's favor. By the time the final whistle blew, Elmer Klopp had singlehandedly, elevenhandedly, or underhandedly — whichever way one cared to look at it — run up a score of 58 points.

He had never enjoyed himself so much in all his lives.

While reporters raced for phones

and photographers pleaded for group photos; while Coach Gutz and the faculty tugged at his arms and pounded him on the backs (quarter-, half-, and full-) Elmer headed for the showers.

Ada and the Professor were waiting for him, as they had promised.

"Well?" he chorused. "How did you like me — I mean, us? Think we're going to make the All-American?"

"You were wonderful," Ada breathed. "Every one of you."

"Great game," the Professor conceded. "You've got good heads on your shoulders." He rubbed his hands together brusquely. "But now, let's get started with the Psychopathfinder. Which one of you wants to go first?"

ELMER Klopp halted, all twenty-two feet coming to a full stop.

"Not me," said his first eleventh.

"Me neither," said his second fraction.

"Well don't expect me to go," said his third aspect. "I like it just the way I am. Or the way we are."

"Why should we bother to take a treatment?" Elmer Number Four asked. "Look what we can do if we all stick together this way."

"Sure," said Elmer Five. "United

we stand, divided we fall."

"But look, you can't go on being eleven people at once," argued the Professor. "I assure you, the strain is too great for any psyche to bear. You *will* fall, all of you, if you remain divided this way."

"All right," said Elmer Number Six. "Then just tell us this. Which one of us will be left? Number One? Number Eleven? Me? Myself? Or I?"

"I don't know," the Professor hedged.

"Well, you'd better find out," Elmer Seven asserted. "Because I don't intend to take the rap for the rest of myself."

"Me neither," Elmer the Eighth chimed in. "This is one case where the parts are greater than the whole."

"I'm with you," said Elmer Nine. "Think I want to become extinct and let one of you other guys play around with my girl?"

"*Your* girl?" snapped Elmer Number Ten. "She's *my* girl."

"You're both wrong," yelled the eleventh Elmer. "I saw her first. Anyways, not more than fifth, maybe."

"We'll all have her," declared Number Four. "Let the best men win, I say. Nothing can stand between us and the girl we love. And if she isn't faithful to the eleven of us —"

Professor Noid raised his goatee for silence, but the Elmers overruled him.

"Great idea!" yelled Elmer the Third. "Why don't the twelve of us get married and set up house-keeping together?"

"In a big house," added Elmer Six. "With lots of twin beds."

"One bed," insisted Elmer Number Nine. "Thirty feet wide."

Ada stepped into the center of the circle. "Now listen, boys," she said. "Much as I love all of you, this will never do. Marriage isn't a football game, and I'm not going to be tossed around between the eleven of you. One Elmer is enough."

"Who do you think you are?" demanded Elmer Two. "Trying to tell us, your *fiance*, what to do?"

The girl stamped her foot. "I won't marry the whole eleven," she declared. "That would be bigamy."

"Damned big of you," Elmer Ten agreed. "But that's the way it's going to be. All or nothing."

"Nothing, then!" Cheeks flaming and eyes blinking, Ada rushed from the circle and the sound of her receding footsteps raised a clattering echo in the dressing-room. The door slammed.

"Now see what you've done!" accused Professor Noid.

Elmer hung his heads.

"I told you this multiple-split

would be too much for a single personality to handle," he went on. "And you realize now that I'm correct. You've started fighting among yourself."

"Yourselves," corrected Elmer Seven.

"Yourself," repeated the Professor. "You're one person, despite the physical demarcation. So this squabbling was meaningless. No matter how your physical forms disappear, you're still the same person; you still could have had Ada. Now you've lost her."

"She'll be back," said Elmer Eight. "She loves us."

THE Professor shrugged. "My niece, despite her training, is still a stubborn girl. Once she makes up her mind, she seldom changes it. No, I think you'll find she won't be back."

"Don't say that," said the Elmers, in unison once more.

"Let's drop the subject," suggested Professor Noid, "and get down to cases. Your cases. I'm anxious to see you undergo an immediate series of treatments. The drain on psychic energy and physical energy — dispersed over eleven forms — must be terrific. I'd hate to see it injure you permanently."

"Who cares?" moaned the Elmers. "I am tired, but that doesn't

matter. I hate to think what the machine might change me into next, but that doesn't matter, either. Ada's gone. I wish I was dead."

"Don't talk about such things," The Professor warned. "Just line up now and let's start the treatments. You first."

Elmer One shambled forward listlessly. "I hope my part vanishes," he announced. "Without Ada, what's there to live for?"

The machine droned. The ten remaining Elmers watched their counterpart jiggle and twitch; his head invisible within the aperture of the machine. Abruptly, his body became invisible, too.

"Next," called the Professor. The performance was repeated, but the spectator Elmers showed no emotion. They were sagging with weariness and revulsion.

Three, four, five, six, seven of the Elmers disappeared. Still the remainder contemplated their counterparts' vanishing without a sign of life.

Eight, nine, ten.

The eleventh Elmer stepped forward. "Maybe I'll disappear too," he said, hopefully. "That would be nice. End it all. Peaceful in the grave, for ever and ever."

"Stop that!" pleaded the Professor. "You know how this instrument operates by this time. Your

immediate thought-pattern exerts a definite influence on the results of a given treatment. And we're getting deeper and deeper into your basic personality with every subsequent probing. You'll be rid of schizoid traits from now on, so cheer up. Don't allow the *thanatos* — the Death-Wish — to take hold."

"Peaceful and quiet," droned Elmer. "Just sleep, sleep, sleep, with no alarm-clock."

"I beg of you!" the Professor groaned. He silenced Elmer by thrusting his head into the aperture of the Psychopathfinder. Once more the machine hummed and the body jiggled. Jiggled, but did not disappear.

Professor Perry Noid breathed a sigh of relief. He switched off the machine and pulled Elmer's limp form forward. "You all right?" he murmured.

Elmer didn't answer. He didn't breathe a sigh of relief, either. In fact, the Professor realized with a thrill of horror, Elmer wasn't breathing at all.

Professor Noid stared down at the waxen face and glassy eyes of Elmer Klopp. "He's — he's dead!" the Professor gasped. "The urge was too strong, after all."

A logical explanation, he realized, but not the kind that is likely to influence a jury. The psychia-

trist glanced around nervously, congratulating himself only on insisting that the team members must wait outside until he had finished his work on Elmer. The door was locked — but a restless pounding proclaimed that team, coach, reporters and students were getting impatient.

Well, let them. Professor Noid was impatient, too. Hastily, he unhooked and disconnected his apparatus. Might as well take it along while he still had the chance. Once Elmer's body was discovered, neither the apparatus nor his own life would be worth a plugged nickel.

Wondering idly just what a plugged nickel was worth these days, the little Professor staggered out the back entrance, grunting under a load of equipment.

And on the floor, Elmer slept the sleep of one to whom alarm-clocks have forever lost their meaning . . .

CHAPTER XII

IT was not an alarm-clock's ringing that eventually awoke Elmer Klopp, but a much more subtle noise — the fall of night.

Actually, his first thought upon opening his eyes was that the clamor of the team and students from beyond the door had aroused him.

He blinked, sat up stiffly, and rose slowly. The voices and poundings seemed very far away and unimportant.

With languid curiosity he gazed around the locker-room, looking for the Professor. He didn't seem to be there any more, and the equipment was gone.

Elmer shrugged listlessly. It didn't really matter. He was going to change into his street-clothes now, but that didn't really matter, either.

It was night, and time to go. This alone seemed important.

Elmer doffed, donned, and departed through the small exit door at the rear. The parking-space at this side of the stadium was long-since deserted, and he moved out upon the street without encountering opposition.

His feet plodded leadenly. He was very tired; he wanted to go home.

Rounding the corner, he came upon a newsstand. The proprietor sat upon an upturned orange-crate, apparently reading a blatant sex-magazine, beneath which he shame-facedly concealed the science-fiction magazine he was actually perusing.

Scarcely knowing what he did, Elmer approached him and tapped the news vendor on the shoulder.

"Pardon me," he said politely, "but could you direct me to the nearest cemetery?"

"Huh?" queried the man.

"Cemetery," Elmer repeated patiently. "You know, where they bury you."

"Not me they don't," the news vendor declared. "I'd rather die than be buried in one."

"I'm not trying to bury you," Elmer said. "I merely want to get to a cemetery. I've got to go there, in the worst way."

"That would be in a hearse," the news vendor mused, thoughtfully.

"I'll attend to the transportation," Elmer assured him. "If you'll just give me directions."

"Well, there's Belleigh Acres," the man offered. "Right down the street here, about half a mile."

"What kind of a place is it?" Elmer asked. "Quiet?"

"I never heard any sounds coming out of it," said his informant, piously. "Not that I'd hang around and listen if I did." He stared curiously at Elmer's face. "Whatchoo want in a cemetery at this time of night?" he demanded.

"I'm a bit tired," Elmer told him. "I was thinking of finding a spot where I could retire."

"If you're tired already, why do you want to retire?" asked the news vendor. "Seems to me when

you retire in a cemetery, it's kinda permanent, like."

"Exactly what I had in mind," Elmer assured him. "Think of the joy of it, the peace! Freedom from daily cares — no more fret or worries — no more income taxes — no more TV commercials —no more Liberace jokes —"

"Cut it out!" pleaded the news-stand proprietor, feelingly. "A little more of that kind of talk and you'll sell me on the idea of committing suicide."

"Why don't you?" Elmer urged, eagerly. "Then we could go together. Maybe we could rent a crypt or a sarcophagus."

"How did you know my name was Gus?" demanded the news vendor, in agitation. "Who are you anyway? Coming around here with a lot of crazy talk about cemeteries. Suppose you expect me to believe you're dead yourself, is that it?" The vendor laughed sarcastically. "Well, I don't go for that fantasy stuff, see? I'm strictly what you call scientific-minded, get me? Now run along and let me peddle my papers."

With that the little man returned to his science-fiction. He was reading a story about an aristocratic gentleman on Mars, who employed one of the livid-skinned natives as his butler. The tale was called *How Green Was My Valet*,

and it was ever so much more scientific than the puerile fantasy the vendor so rightly despised.

ELMER moved slowly up the street in the direction of Belleigh Acres.

Approaching the darkened, tree-guarded area, he noted with approval the high walls and the sharp spikes surmounting them. The cemetery beyond seemed very remote and secluded indeed.

He turned up the pathway to the entrance gate, which was closed and locked. However, he discovered, a light shone from the window of the small building just beside the gate. Elmer found the door and knocked.

"Come in," called a voice.

He entered the gatekeeper's quarters. An elderly gentleman in the uniform of a guard or watchman sat at a table, ostensibly paging through a sex-magazine, inside of which he had concealed a copy of *Gory Stories* — an alleged comic-book dealing with the supernatural.

"Yes?" said the watchman.

"Pardon me," Elmer said. "But can you tell me what I have to do to get into the cemetery?"

"Drop dead," the watchman muttered.

"I'm serious," Elmer countered.

"So am I," the watchman as-

sured him.

"Isn't there another way?" Elmer asked. "I'm looking for a plot."

"Author?" asked the watchman. "Every once in a while, one of them writers shows up, asks me a lot of crazy questions about my job. Do I ever see any ghosts, and stuff like that."

"Well, do you?"

"Certainly not!" the watchman retorted. "Think I'm nuts? The minute I so much as *hear* a ghost, I right away close my eyes until it goes away."

"Then you're superstitious, is that it?"

"Nonsense," snapped the watchman. "Only superstition I believe in is the one about how, it's bad luck to walk under a black cat."

"Well, I'm no author," Elmer maintained. "I'm here because I want to *rent* a plot. Or maybe a small vault or mausoleum."

The watchman put down his magazine. "What's all this about?" he demanded.

"It's very simple," Elmer insisted. "This is a cemetery, isn't it? And a cemetery is a place where you rent a grave. Very well—I want to rent a grave. Not just any old grave, either, but a good one. The kind of a grave that will last me a lifetime."

"This grave is for yourself?" the

watchman demanded.

"Of course, who else? Besides, what difference does it make? I was under the impression they all came in a standard size."

"What on earth would you be wanting with a grave?" the watchman persisted.

"Very little," Elmer admitted. "It's under the earth that you need one. I feel as if I'd like to curl up in this nice little cemetery of yours and quit the mad rush and turmoil of the outside world. Who wants all this hustle and bustle, this constant striving for success? Let the early bird get the worm, I say."

"You curl up in a grave," said the watchman, sourly, "and you're liable to get a few worms yourself."

"Wouldn't want that," Elmer decided. "Maybe a vault would be best. Though I had sort of counted on a headstone or some kind of marker. You know, with just my name on it, and maybe a friendly warning to people — I was thinking it could say, *Do not Disturb.*"

"Nobody disturbs our graves," the watchman told him. "That's what I'm here for."

"Excellent!" Elmer gave him an ingratiating smile. "Now, could you possibly show me something in a vault?"

"What would you like to see in one?" inquired the watchman. "A

floor show?"

"Let's not be facetious, now," Elmer cautioned. "I'm here to rent and I'm willing to pay good money. But I'm entitled to take a look at the property in advance; isn't that fair?"

"It's fair all right, in a foul sort of way," the watchman said. "Look here, mister — I think you're just trying to talk your way into this cemetery here."

"Of course I am," Elmer replied. "I'm dead set on getting in."

"Dead set isn't enough," the watchman told him. "You've got to be embalmed. And have a death-certificate, and a regular funeral."

"Isn't it enough that I'm dead?" asked the young man, in a pained voice.

"You're — what?"

DEAD," Elmer repeated. "Take a good look at me. I'm not breathing, am I? I belong in this cemetery. I stand upon my rights as a citizen and a corpse."

"Bah!" said the watchman.

"Don't you believe me?" Elmer persisted. "Look at how pale I am. Feel my clammy hands — I should think you'd be scared, at least."

"Stiffs don't frighten me," sneered the watchman.

"How do you know I'm not a ghost?" Elmer hazarded.

"Too solid. No ectoplasm."

"But if I'm not dead, and no ghost, then what would I be trying to get into your cemetery for?"

"Damned if I can figure that out," the watchman admitted. All at once he squinted at Elmer's face and cringed. "Now I see what this is," he panted. "I know what you want to get in for, and why you've been handing me this line of crazy talk. I know what you are!"

"You do?" Elmer blinked. "What am I?"

"A body-snatcher!" The watchman's lower lip trembled. "Sure, I might of guessed it. You're a body-snatcher, all right, one of them ghouls what steals cadavers for the medical students." He retreated around the table slowly. "You should of told me to begin with," he whined.

"Why?"

"Because I'm scared to death of body-snatchers." The watchman trembled and edged towards the door. "Well, this is one body you aren't gonna snatch, let me tell you!" Seizing his opportunity, and the doorknob, the watchman took to his heels.

Elmer waited until he had disappeared beyond the view from the window, then picked up the gate-keys from their rack on the wall and let himself into the cemetery.

It was dark and dismal and altogether delightful in there. He

wandered down the tomb-bordered pathways, into a maze of statuary, cenotaphs and markers. A chill wind whispered in the trees.

Elmer walked along, looking for either an untenanted crypt or a suitable spot in which to dig in. His throat was dry, and he suddenly realized that he was quite hungry.

He reminded himself that the dead have no appetite, and moved along. Enough of this window-shopping; he would have to pick himself out a permanent parking space.

Suddenly he whirled, startled by a sound.

"Psssst!" hissed a voice.

"What's that?" he quavered.

"I said 'Psssst!', " the voice told him "Can't you even understand English?"

"Are you English?" Elmer wanted to know.

"Pennsylvania Dutch," the voice hissed. "But what's that got to do with it?"

"Do with what?"

"Come here and find out," the voice urged.

"Where are you?"

"Inside this vault, of course. Where else would I be?"

Elmer approached a large tomb off to the left. "Are you looking for a spot to rent too?" he asked.

The voice chuckled. "Not me, brother. I own this little piece of

property. All bought and paid for. Got it for a song, years ago. Almost doubled in value — bet I could make 100% profit on it, if I wanted to sell."

"Why don't you, then?" Elmer suggested. "Can't tell when the market might drop again. Now's the time to get out from under."

"I get out from under every night," the voice replied "Same as you do, friend. Funny I never bumped into you before."

"I'm new here," Elmer explained. "Just got in tonight."

"I see." The voice sounded sympathetic. "Trying to walk the stiffness off, eh? Damned embalming fluid."

ELMER approached the black, bleak entrance to the tomb.

"Well, don't just stand there," the voice continued. "Come right in, make yourself at home. Pull up a slab and sit down. Sorry I can't offer you something to eat, but there isn't a bite left in the house. And I'm afraid I'm badly overdrawn at the blood-bank. My last check spattered."

Laughter curdled out of the darkness. Elmer stepped back.

"Who are you?" he murmured.

"Kemia is the name, buddy," the voice told him. "Luke Kemia. Isn't that a hell of a name for a vampire?"

"It certainly is," agreed Elmer, with feeling. He retreated a step, but the voice called after him.

"And who might you be?"

"I'm Elmer Klopp," said the young man. "I was formerly a member of the student body at the University."

"Student body, eh?" The voice was wistful. "How I'd like to get my teeth into a good student body right about now! I'm so hungry I could eat fingernails."

"Not mine," Elmer cautioned.

"Of course not. Don't be afraid! Besides, in a couple of minutes we ought to have some action around here."

"Action?"

"Sure. The car is due any minute."

"What car?"

"The dining-car, I call it." Again the voice chuckled. "You'll see!"

And Elmer did. Even as the voice spoke, Elmer noted the sweep of headlights moving along the road from the unbarred gate. A large car — a strangely familiar car — rolled into the cemetery and halted in the roadway beside the tomb.

Elmer gasped. It was the red limousine!

He turned, half-expecting to see the two beards emerge. But instead a feminine voice called, "Luke!"

"Coming!"

A spidery-limbed, cloaked figure emerged from the tomb and Elmer caught a glimpse of a gaunt visage with an anvil-shaped chin. It moved towards the red car as the door swung open.

"What's on the menu tonight?" the voice hissed.

"You'll see," the feminine voice replied.

Elmer listened intently. This voice, as well as this car, was familiar to him. Suddenly he placed it.

"Sonia," he called. "Sonia Noodlemayer!"

"Who's there?"

"It's Elmer Klopp," he said. "Or rather, the late Elmer Klopp. You see, I got in that machine again and almost disappeared — but instead I came out dead. Still, better late than never, I always say."

"Klopp? Machine?" The feminine voice grew shrill. Elmer approached the car.

"Sure. Remember last night, when I was in the ape's body? That was the machine's work. I got back today and took another treatment and it turned me into a football team. Didn't you see me play this afternoon?"

"I was sleeping," Sonia said. "But tell me more."

"Well, like I said, then I took another treatment and I think I

died. Because all I wanted to do was come here and find a grave. The Professor thinks it's the death-instinct, or something like that, but I couldn't talk to him about it because he went away before I woke up."

"Let's find him and ask him," Sonia suggested. "Climb in the front seat here with me."

"But you've got a vampire in the car."

"Oh, don't mind *him*," Sonia laughed. "He's a little crazy but perfectly harmless. Sometimes he thinks he's a vampire and then again he thinks he's Napoleon. We call him the Little Corpuscule."

"Now I understand," Elmer said, sliding into the front seat as Sonia leaned over, closed the door, and started the car rolling swiftly around the path to the gateway once more. "You just came here to pick him up and take him back home, is that it?"

"This is his home," Sonia purred. "And he is a vampire, just as he said — but harmless. Too old to hurt anybody, really. I have to get all his meals for him."

"You?"

"Of course." She laughed again. "It's we young ones who do all the work."

Elmer suddenly remembered her remarks about sleeping by day. And he remembered, last night,

during their embrace, how she had started to reach for his neck.

"Y-you're a vampire, too?" he whispered.

The car picked up speed.

"Certainly." Sonia licked her red lips. "And don't look so horrified. After all, if what you tell me is true — you're a vampire yourself, now!"

CHAPTER XIII

DEAD or alive, nobody jumps out of a car speeding at sixty miles an hour.

Elmer didn't try it. He merely huddled in his seat and tried to reason out what Sonia Noodlemayer had told him. The more he thought about it, the more sense it made in a grisly sort of way.

He'd wished he was dead, but the Psycopathfinder couldn't exterminate him. Instead, it had given him a half life; that of the Undead. No wonder he had revived at the coming of darkness and sought a cemetery. No wonder he felt hungry, thirsty — Elmer shuddered.

All at once he didn't want to be dead any more. He wanted to find the Professor and use the machine. Anything would be preferable to his present lack of existence.

Sonia was still staring at him and giggling, and Elmer realized he'd better maintain his compo-

sure. He was too close to being decomposed as it was.

"What's the matter?" the blonde asked.

"Nothing, really. It's just that it's a bit hard for me to get used to the idea," Elmer replied. "I never dreamed you were a vampire."

"Neither does anyone else," Sonia purred. "When Hans met me in Kirghiz, he didn't have the faintest notion. To him I was just an innocent young widow who had the misfortune of losing four previous husbands — something that could happen to anybody."

"Why did he marry you?" Elmer asked.

"He didn't. *I* married *him*," Sonia corrected. "Because I wanted to leave the country and come to America, the land of progress, opportunity, new ideas, and —"

"Fresh blood," supplied Luke Kemia, from the back seat.

"Well, that too," Sonia admitted. "Anyway, I married him and when he finished his field trip we came here. He still doesn't suspect a thing, you know. I've gotten him used to the idea that I prefer to sleep by day. He leaves me alone."

"But don't vampires have to sleep in grave-earth?" Elmer asked.

"I always wear a mud-pack to bed," Sonia explained. "Hans thinks it's a beauty-treatment, but he can't understand why I don't

bother with mirrors when I make up my face." She giggled again. "In many ways, he's the ideal husband; he's so naive. He doesn't even mind all the students who come around to visit — he thinks I like to talk to them because I have an appetite for knowledge."

"We know what kind of an appetite you have," Luke Kemia chuckled. "No wonder so many of those poor kids drop out of circulation after a few visits to you. With some of them, I hear, their circulation stops entirely."

"Don't believe Luke," Sonia told Elmer. "He's always full of those underground rumors of his. Actually, most of them just think they're developing anemia and leave school. There have been only one or two — accidents."

Elmer shivered.

"Relax," the blonde urged, clawing his shoulder. "You must learn to be philosophical about these things. After all, that's the way life is. Somebody is bound to get it in the neck."

"Particularly if they hang around you," Luke supplied.

Elmer forced a smile. "I suppose I'll get used to the idea, in time," he said. "Right now it all seems a bit strange. I'll have to accustom myself to being a vampire; there's so much I don't know. I'll have to learn the ropes."

"To say nothing of the veins and arteries," Luke Kemia added. "They're more important."

Sonia nodded. "Don't you worry about a thing," she reassured him. "It's really very simple. Sleep by day, walk by night. Avoid mirrors, running water, crucifixes, and the touch of silver. Get plenty of stale air and stick to a well-balanced diet. Don't worry, you'll soon get your teeth into it."

ELMER'S teeth did a little quiet chattering. As soon as he could immobilize his molars, he said, "But might I ask what you were doing in the cemetery? And where did you get this car? What about those two men with beards — are they vampires, too?"

"Of course not!" Sonia rounded a corner and turned down a side-street. "Boris and Morris don't even know I'm one. Didn't you see them threaten me with a knife the other evening?"

"I did, and that's what I can't understand."

"Just a little argument over politics," Sonia explained. "You see, they think I'm just a regular agent."

"Agent?"

"They're Communist spies, of course," Sonia said. "They came to Hardnox on the strength of a rumor that your friend Professor

Noid had invented some new kind of gadget. Their instructions are to capture it and smuggle it out of the country — so that the Soviets can take credit for inventing it. You know the Communist line; they like to claim they invented everything from space-ships to sex. So I agreed to help them steal it. I sent Hans over to make friends with the Professor and investigate. I gave Boris and Morris my car today and let them go after the Psychopath-finder."

"But why are you working with them?" Elmer asked.

"Because I'm a Communist myself."

"A Communist vampire?"

"There's a law against it, maybe?" Sonia retorted. "What makes you think all vampires have to vote Republican?"

"I see. No wonder you were anxious to get into this country." Elmer mused. "But what's your connection with Luke, here?"

"That's different," Sonia continued. "When I arrived in Hardnox, I didn't know anyone but my husband. So naturally, I started looking around to see if I could dig up a few friends."

"You sure picked a place for it," Elmer admitted. "In a cemetery."

"Where else?" Sonia demanded. "Anyway, Luke here was the only vampire I could find. We spent a

great deal of time together during those first few months, and became well-acquainted. I must say for him that he seems grateful."

"You know how it is," Luke said. "Nobody likes to eat alone."

"But even if you are a vampire," Elmer ventured, "I can't understand how you, as a 100% native, red-blooded American, would associate with a Communist."

"Oh, I don't know." Luke shrugged. "I've got nothing against red-blooded Americans — in fact, they're the kind I like best. But Sonia has converted me. She says things are better for us vampires under the Communist system. The Soviets are against capitalism, you know; they don't let people spend a lot of money on embalming, and sealed metal coffins. A Soviet vampire would never have to leave his graveyard to search for nourishment. Makes sense to me. So I decided to help her. After all, one gets tired of just dabbling in blood. Now I also dabble in politics."

Sonia put her arm on Elmer's shoulder. "And you're going to help me, too," she said. "Aren't you?"

"Well —"

"What else is there left for you to do?" she asked. "Oh, I know all about you and that little snip of an Ada Noid. But she's not for you now. You're one of *us*. Think it over, and you'll see. What would

you do if you married her — take a honeymoon trip in a hearse?"

"But the Professor's machine could change me back —"

"Ah, yes," Sonia smiled. "Only you forget the Professor doesn't have his machine any more. Boris and Morris stole it from Judge Spleen's courtroom this noon, remember? I'm going to their hideout now and look it over."

ELMER remembered the cylinder he had substituted for the Psychopathfinder. Apparently the Soviet agents didn't realize it was a phoney. Well at least that was something.

"We'll smuggle it onto a plane tomorrow," Sonia explained. "And fly it across the border. There's another plane waiting for us in Mexico. We can take it directly to the Kremlin. What a triumph! Elmer, you'll be hailed as a hero!"

"Lucky you ran into him," Luke commented. "Seeing as how he must know the way to operate the machine."

"That's right," Sonia agreed. "I hadn't counted on it, either. I thought I might have to kidnap Ada and the Professor. Now, of course, that will be unnecessary."

Elmer was thinking fast, and this last remark decided him. As long as nobody knew the machine was a fake, as long as he pretended

to fall in with their plans, the girl and her uncle would be safe. And so would the real Psychopathfinder.

It might mean sacrificing himself, but it was the only way. After all, what else had he to live for? If being a vampire was living, that is?

So he turned to Sonia and grinned. "Good enough," he said. "I'm with you."

"Then follow me," she said. "Here we are."

The red limousine had turned into an alley just in back of Main Street and nosed into a parking-space between two buildings.

Sonia opened the door and Elmer got out, followed by Luke. "Can't we pick up a snack somewhere before we go in?" he grumbled. "I'm starved."

She shook her head. "Business comes first," the blonde reminded him.

"Maybe just a small child?" Luke pleaded wistfully. "Something to nibble on between meals?"

"Later."

She picked her way through the yard until she reached a cellar door.

"Down here," she directed.

Boris and Morris rented the basement from some fool on Main Street. He doesn't even suspect

what they're up to — thinks they're using the cellar to grow mushrooms in."

The trio descended into darkness. Elmer tripped over something that tinkled and broke.

"Bottle," Sonia said. "The owner's a tavern-keeper, I guess. Stacks his empties down here."

She groped for a door, opened it. Light flooded the corridor from the room beyond.

The two beards — Boris and Morris — rose from behind a table in the cellarway.

"Everything all right?" whispered Sonia.

Boris nodded. His smaller companion eyed Elmer suspiciously. "Who's he?"

"My name's Elmer Klopp," the young man offered. "The last time you saw me I was just an ignorant gorilla. But I have seen the light. I am now a sworn follower of the Party Line, and full of dialectical materialism."

"You vouch for him?" Morris asked.

The blonde nodded. "Completely. He's a sort of bloodbrother of mine." She paused. "Besides, he knows how to work that machine you stole. Where is it?"

"Right over here."

BORIS indicated the bulky structure of the hi-fi low pass

vacuum-precipitated ten-lamination acetate bonded orthoflow telekinesis booster tank circuit.

"Funny thing," he said. "Morris and I have been fiddling around with it for hours, and we can't get the hang of how it works. We plug it in, but nothing happens."

"Don't worry," Sonia said. "That's why I brought Elmer along. He understands all about it, don't you, Elmer?"

"Sure I do," Elmer smiled. "The minute we get to Moscow, I'll give you a demonstration."

"No," Boris shook his beard. "We can't afford to take chances, comrade. Suppose something happened to you before then — who would know how to operate this device?"

"But nothing will happen," Elmer told him.

"One never knows," Boris smiled and patted his hip, which bulged ominously. "I think it would be better if you gave us all a demonstration right now."

"But —" Elmer hesitated. "You understand what this machine does, don't you? It's a Psychopathfinder. It gives a sort of mechanical psychiatric treatment, but it alters the whole person; physically and metabolically, as well as mentally. Anyone who uses it may experience a radical change."

"Well, we're all radicals," Mor-

ris beamed.

"No, I'm not making myself clear. This machine turned me into a gorilla. Do any of you want to take such a risk?"

"Of course not. There would be no place for a gorilla in Russia, except maybe in the secret police."

"Well, then," Elmer shrugged. "No subject — no demonstration."

"Wait a minute!" Boris said. "I can get you a subject."

"You can? How?"

Boris stabbed his finger at the ceiling. "Upstairs," he said. "That tavern-keeper. He always closes up on Saturday night so he can go out and get drunk. I know his habits; he must be dressing right now."

"But that's dangerous —"

"Poof, begging your pardon." He turned to Sonia and bowed graciously. "It doesn't matter. We leave here on the plane at midnight. So what if we leave a gorilla behind? Or a dead body."

"Don't leave it," Luke begged. "Somebody might get hungry on the trip."

Sonia flashed him a warning glance, and the elderly vampire subsided sullenly.

"Very well," she said. "Let's get him."

Smiling, Boris slipped out of the room.

"Go ahead and make your preparations," the blonde commanded. "We haven't any time to waste."

Elmer stepped up to the cylinder and examined it. This was not turning out the way he had hoped or expected. The heavy tank had wires extending to a plug, and he fitted the plug into a socket, whereupon nothing happened. A valve-cock on the side seemed to govern a spigot. Elmer tilted the cylinder and heard a squishing sound.

There was no hope here — nothing he could possibly utilize to fake a demonstration with. He stood silent, praying that the tavern-keeper would have left before Boris could find him.

BUT luck was not with him. Instead, Boris was. And with Boris came the tavern-keeper. The Soviet agent dragged him into the room at revolver-point, and the redheaded man goggled incredulously until his eyes found Elmer's. Then he goggled credulously and said, "What are you doing here?"

"You stole my line," Elmer accused. "I didn't know this cellar was under your tavern."

"Where else could it be?" demanded Michael Finn, surlily. "You never heard of a cellar being over a tavern, did you?" He ran a hand over his toupee.

"Now what kind of crazy business are you mixed up in?" he asked, wearily. "Last night it was pink elephants."

"Tonight it's Reds," Elmer told him. "We're all Communist agents."

The bartender turned to Boris. "Then you're not just raising mushrooms down here," he murmured. "Kind of suspected that, the minute you stuck a gun in my ribs." He pouted. "I knew I should have asked for references before I let you move in. And to think I passed up a chance to rent this here cellar to a nice, respectable bunch of dope-smugglers."

"Shuddup!" snapped Boris, reverting momentarily to his native tongue. "All right, here's your subject. Now what do we do?"

Elmer wished he knew. Stalling desperately he said. "Well, the first thing is for all of you to line up over there against the wall."

"Why?" Morris wanted to know.

"I've got to warm up the machine," Elmer said. "And the vibrations are lethal, in a deadly sort of way. Scientific tests have proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that fatal vibrations can sometimes kill you, especially if they exterminate your life."

"Jeez, I never knew you was a scientist," marvelled Michael

Finn. "Say, mebbe you could tell me which brand of cigarette I should smoke, huh?"

"Later," Elmer agreed. "Now, everybody line up against the wall. And perhaps it would be better if you all closed your eyes."

"Not me!" Morris snapped. "I don't trust you. I want to see what goes on."

"Very well." It wasn't, but what else could Elmer say? He stepped over to the cylinder and twisted the faucet control for want of something better to do.

A spray of something very much like water shot from the faucet on the upper sides of the cylinder. As a matter of fact, it *was* water. It spurted over the table and ran along the floor.

"Yi!" screeched Luke Kemia, suddenly. "Water — don't let it touch me!"

Sonia cowered back. Elmer remembered that she had warned him against running water — vampires couldn't cross it. Gaily, he increased the flow.

"What the —?" Boris inquired, stepping forward. Elmer twisted the faucet and a stream spattered Boris in the eyes. He staggered back, and Morris was drenched. The two vampires clawed the wall.

Without waiting for any further effects, Elmer turned and ran

out of the room. He pounded up the stairs, threw open the door and hurtled into the red limousine.

The car careened up the alley and down the street. Elmer ground to a halt before Professor Noid's tree-bordered home and in a moment he was pounding on the front door, gratified to see that a light shone from within the house.

Then the door opened and Ada held out her arms.

"Elmer! I thought you were dead!"

The young man recoiled. "Don't touch me," he said huskily. "I am!" "W-what—?"

"Where's the Professor?"

"Upstairs, in the laboratory."

"Come on, then."

THEY hastened, two steps at a time. As the laboratory door swung back, Professor Noid looked up, his goatee bristling with apprehension.

"Oh, my! I was afraid it might be the police!"

"We'll need them, soon," Elmer said. "But not while I'm in my present condition. Get me into that headshrinker machine of yours, right away."

"Aren't you going to tell us what happened?"

"I will," Elmer sighed. "But I don't like it." Swiftly he filled the Professor and the girl in on the

events of the past few hours.

"And it's all my fault," he concluded, mournfully. "What a fool I was to get mixed up with that Sonia woman in the first place!"

Ada shook her head in violent agreement and Elmer cringed.

"Don't look at me like that," he begged. "You make me feel as if I was about a foot high. I'd like to crawl in a hole someplace and die."

"You nearly did," the Professor reminded him. "So don't go getting any more ideas. Let the Psychopathfinder conquer your death-wish, and that's enough."

"But I feel so helpless about all this, so insignificant," Elmer protested. "If I'd only known —"

"The Psychopathfinder is ready," Professor Noid interrupted, rubbing his hands lackadaisically. "Hurry and let's get started. The minute you're finished we can alert the police."

"Just don't think about anything except returning to normal," Ada cautioned.

Elmer shook his head, then placed it in the aperture. The Professor operated the panel. The spirals revolved, the drooping rose, the shaking increased.

And something happened to Elmer.

"Stop the machine!" Ada cried.

"He's — he's *shrinking!*"

The Professor looked up. It was true. The young man appeared to be dwindling before their very eyes. He grew smaller, and smaller, and smaller —

"Turn it off!" Ada screamed. As her uncle threw the switch, the girl ran forward and caught Elmer's body before it fell.

It wasn't really a strenuous accomplishment, for the young man had dwindled away inside his clothing to the size of a rather small doll. To be exact, he was now about a foot high.

"Back to the womb," the Professor murmured. "The basic feeling of insecurity at last. He felt small, inadequate, unable to cope with the problems of —"

"Me too," Ada exclaimed, eyeing the diminutive figure in her arms. "How can we call the police now, when he's like this?"

"Something tells me we won't have to worry about that," the Professor sighed. "Unless I'm wrong about those footsteps outside, we have company."

"Dear Lord in heaven," Ada murmured, as Elmer's oversize clothing dropped unheeded to the floor. "Now what happens?"

"Plenty," announced a voice from the doorway.

Boris and Morris entered the room.

CHAPTER XIV

AS they entered, the Professor threw up his hands in despair, an emotional prompting automatically reinforced by the sight of Boris's automatic.

Ada turned away and hastily wrapped Elmer's naked form in a laboratory rag.

"Come back here," Morris called. "You put up your hands, too, lady."

"Please," Ada sniffed. "Is that any way to talk to a mother?"

"Mother?"

"Yes." Ada held out Elmer, who now stirred and opened his eyes. As comprehension of his situation dawned, he started to speak, but the girl quickly clapped her hand over his tiny mouth.

Boris stepped forward. "How come?" he demanded. "You didn't have a baby with you this morning."

"I know." Ada's eyes were downcast. "I'm as surprised as you are. But that's the price a girl pays for living in one of these college towns and listening to the blandishments of the students. I ought to have known what would happen when I accepted his maternity pin."

"Fraternity, isn't it?"

Ada held up the small figure in her arms. "Maternity," she insisted. "I ought to know."

"Born today, eh?"

"This very evening."

"You seem to have recovered quickly, lady."

"Now wait a minute," Morris interrupted his companion. "This isn't a clinic, you know. What are you going to do, give the baby a blue ribbon? Remember, we came here on a mission."

Boris scowled and lifted his automatic. "That is right," he intoned. "So let's get going. Professor, unhook that machine of yours. Morris will help you carry it downstairs to the car. By the way, Morris — you can dismiss our taxi. We will return in the red limousine which our young friend parked out in front so conveniently."

He gazed around the room. "By the way," he said. "Where is Elmer?"

"Don't mention his name to me," Ada muttered. "He's the scoundrel who's responsible for my condition."

The infantile figure squirmed in her arms at this, but she kept her hand tightly over its mouth.

"But where is he now?"

Ada cocked her head at the machine. "My uncle put him in there for a treatment and that's the last we saw of him."

"You mean, he disappeared?"

"Right." The girl nodded.

"I don't believe you."

"Search if you like."

"We haven't time." Boris waved his gun. "Hurry up, you two." He motioned the girl forward. "Come along."

"Me? But I've got to take care of the baby. He must have his bottle—"

"Plenty of bottles where we're going," Boris assured her. "And I'll be glad to get back. I could use a drink."

The Professor worked silently, his shoulders sagging. They sagged even more as he began carting the Psychopathfinder down the stairs. Morris walked behind him, lugging the panel control board and auxiliary wires. Boris herded them forward, watching Ada and her tiny burden preceding him.

UNNOTICED and unimpeded they entered the red limousine and in a few moments the car parked once more in the alley area behind Ye Olde Gin Mill.

Morris got out first.

"The rest of you stay here," Boris commanded. "Until he takes a look to see if the coast is clear. I don't trust your story about Elmer. He might have gotten away and called the police."

Morris descended into the cellar. He was gone quite a while. When he reemerged, Boris said, "Well?"

"They're not there," the second beard told him.

"Aha, just as I suspected —"

"No, it's all right," Morris broke in, hastily. "They just moved upstairs to the tavern. Sonia and Luke didn't like the water, I guess. But the place is closed, the shades are drawn, and we can go right in. That bartender has been mixing them a few drinks to calm their nerves."

"He can mix me one," Boris said. "Let's go."

They went.

Entering the tavern through the rear door, they greeted Sonia and Luke, who stared at them in glassy-eyed silence from their seats at the bar. Michael Finn nodded glumly at them across the counter.

"Your friends don't like water, it seems," he explained. "So I been mixing them something a little stronger."

"So I see." Boris eyed the vampires, who sat rigid on their stools. "What are you drinking?"

"I don't know," Luke said, faintly. "It's awfully strong."

"Very," Sonia agreed. "I feel quite numb."

"You look it," Boris told her. "What's the name of that stuff, bartender?"

"Why, it's a Silver Fizz."

"Silver?"

Luke tried to move from his stool but couldn't make it.

"That's right," Michael Finn said. "Made according to my own secret formula. Just a wee drop of silver nitrate in it, too."

"Silver nitrate?" Sonia uttered a faint gasp. "I've been poisoned — let me out of here —"

She wobbled, then fell back. Clawing at the bar, she tried to stand up, but it was too late. She opened her mouth to scream, but all that came out was a puff of smoke. And then she fell to the floor with a clatter. The clatter was understandable enough, for by the time she landed, her body was gone; only a pile of bones remained.

Luke peered down with glassy eyes. "Help me, somebody," he croaked. "Get a doctor — call Alcoholics Anonymous —"

Then he too was gone.

Michael Finn grinned. "Minute I saw how scared they was of water, I knew what they were," he said. "I heard all about vampires in the Old Country, from my mother-in-law. She used to read up on such things; anyway she was an expert." He scratched his toupee thoughtfully. "Come to think of it, my mother-in-law was quite an old bat. I wonder if —"

"Stop wondering!" Regaining his

composure, Boris stepped forward. "Maybe those two were vampires, but we're not. And you won't get rid of us with any silver nitrate. Just keep quiet now, or you'll be quiet permanently."

Michael Finn gazed at the gun and subsided.

Boris turned to his partner. "All right — tell the Professor to set up the machine. We're still going to have our demonstration before we leave."

OBEDIENTLY, Morris and Professor Noid set to work at the end of the bar. Disconnecting the juke-box, the Professor plugged in the panel control-board.

"Where's Elmer?" Michael Finn asked.

"Disappeared," Ada told him, shortly.

"I see you've got a bundle from heaven," the bartender observed. "Congratulations. I didn't know you were expecting."

"Frankly, neither did I," the girl answered. "The stork brought this particular bundle in a hurry."

"Special delivery, maybe?"

"Just the ordinary kind," Ada said.

"Ugly little thing," Michael Finn commented, peering over the bar. "Excuse me for saying so, lady, but it almost looks as if your baby needed a shave."

"I do," Elmer piped up.

"It talks!" the bartender gasped.

"It wasn't talking ten minutes ago." Boris muttered, giving Ada a frown. "You said it had just been born."

"Can I help it if I'm precocious?" Elmer lisped. "It's not my fault that I'm brilliant — any more than it's yours that you're subnormal."

"Why, you —"

"You wouldn't strike a helpless infant, would you?" Elmer cooed, spitting in the bearded man's eye.

"Lady — either you shut that brat up or I'll —" Boris peered down at Elmer and recognition dawned. "You lied to me," he declared. "I know who that is. It's Elmer Klopp."

"All right." Ada sighed. "I may as well admit it. Nothing matters any more."

Elmer struggled in her arms. "Put me down," he muttered. "Put me down and I'll beat hell out of him. He can't talk to you like that!"

"Dry up!" Boris commanded. "Or I'll strangle you in your own diapers."

Morris tapped him on the shoulder. "The Professor says we're all ready," he said.

"Excellent."

"Do you want the bartender to undergo a demonstration treat-

ment?"

Boris hesitated. He eyed the tiny figure in Ada's arms. "No," he said. "Let's use Elmer, here. The bartender is of some use to us — he can help transport this equipment to the plane before we kill him. But this insignificant little thing — who cares what becomes of him?"

"I do," Ada volunteered.

"Me too!" Elmer added.

"Never mind. Into the machine you go!" Boris grabbed the squirming form from Ada's arms and carried it over to the Psychopath-finder. Despite the Professor's horrified protests, he stuffed the foot-long figure into the aperture usually reserved for a human head.

"All right," he said. "Commence the demonstration!"

Ada ran forward and tugged at her uncle's arm. "You can't," she cried. "Maybe he'll disappear entirely this time!"

"You'll all disappear entirely if you don't do what I say," Boris reminded her. "Now stand back!"

"Get me out of here!" Elmer wailed, in a shrill falsetto. "If I was only myself, I'd —"

"Start the machine!" Boris waved his gun.

The Professor pulled the switch. Spiral — drone — shake — shudder — and the tiny figure, squirming in the aperture.

And then the figure wasn't so tiny any more.

"Thank God!" Ada breathed. "He's growing again!"

IT was true. Before their eyes Elmer was elongating, emerging from the machine until his feet touched the floor and his nude, quivering body resumed its normal proportions.

"That's enough — shut it off!" Boris called.

The Professor obeyed. Ada ran forward as Elmer slumped from the Psychopathfinder and fell into her arms. He opened his eyes and she stared into them, then recoiled with dismay.

"H-he's gone back!" she whispered to the Professor. "Look at him — he's the way he was before — a vampire!"

And it was true. Elmer rose to his feet, eyes set in a somnambulistic stare.

Then they blurred. Everything blurred. Elmer's outline wavered dimly, coalesced, and suddenly expanded.

"He's still going," Ada marvelled.

"Repeating the cycle in reverse!" Professor Noid nodded. "Now, the next step."

"What's all this?" Boris demanded.

Nobody answered him. Everyone

watched Elmer.

Everyone watched Elmers.

For all at once there were two Elmers, then three, then four, five, six —

"Where did they come from?" Morris chattered. "Hey, stop," this joint is getting too crowded!"

It was more than crowded. Boris tried to train his gun on eleven Elmers, but even a well-trained gun cannot cover eleven naked men.

Instead, they covered Boris; and Morris, too. The Soviet agents went down in a tangle of writhing bodies. Abruptly, the tangle diminished. Now there were only three on the tavern floor — Boris, Morris, and the huge gorilla that banged their skulls together.

And then there was only Elmer, holding them erect. Boris managed to open one eye. His hand reached feebly for the fallen weapon, raised it.

"Look out!" screamed Ada.

But Elmer didn't notice the gun. Instead he ducked, as the pink elephant materialized, swaying above them. Its right forefoot came down on Boris's hand, and the gun dropped.

"Yeow!" Boris cried. The elephant disappeared. Morris broke free, and pulling his battered partner to his feet, tried to make a run for it. Elmer sat on the floor, look-

ing at them. Their pants fell down. Their clothes fell off. He tackled them and tied their beards together.

Then he stood up and draped a bar-rag over his nudity.

"That's that," he declared. "I think I'm myself again."

"So do I," breathed the girl. "Oh, thank goodness!" She swayed into his arms. They kissed. Suddenly she drew back. "Something new has been added," she declared. "You still kiss like that football team."

Professor Noid rubbed his hands together weakly. "A triumph for the Psychopathfinder," he commented. "A complete demonstration of its practicality. You have undergone a complete psychotherapy, rooted out all inhibitions, compulsions, delusions, phobias; the death-wish, the desire to return to the womb — congratulations are in order for all of us."

"You mean this calls for a drink?" Michael Finn asked, eagerly.

"Why not? We've proved our

theory, Elmer is a new man, the Soviets are thwarted, we've gotten rid of the vampires—" The Professor paused, eyeing the bones on the floor dubiously. "Er — what do we do about these?" he asked.

"Send them to Noodlemayer," Ada suggested. "After all, he's an anthropologist. Vampire-bones might be something new in his line. We did promise him something for Christmas you know."

"I'll have them boxed," the Professor agreed. "Handsomely."

Michael Finn stirred, shook and poured briskly.

"Here you are," he announced. "How about a couple of grasshoppers?"

"Oh!" Elmer looked at Ada and groaned. "This is where I came in. Once you drink one of these things, anything can happen."

"And probably will," Ada told him. "But don't worry. Something tells me that from now on you're going to enjoy it."

Together, they lifted their glasses and drank.

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Magic Matter



by JOEL BERENDT

THE prosaic name "Solid State Physics" conceals a branch of science which is producing wildly exciting discoveries every day. The transistor, that miraculous imitation of a vacuum tube, minute photo-cells and tiny rectifiers, are familiar recent products of this half-science, half-art.

The latest, and in some ways, the most promising and startling development in the field of solid state physics, is the Solarcell announced by the fruitful Bell Laboratories. This crystalline gadget turns sunlight into electricity, not efficiently enough for commercial applications—yet—but the promise is there.

Every second of daylight delivers to the Earth's surface an incalcul-

able amount of energy. The new Solar cell can take this energy, albeit on a small scale and deliver it as kilowatts.

When the cell is turned from the laboratory into the engineering lines, the energy sources of the Earth are going to be enriched.

It is not impossible to imagine acre after acre of Solar cell, constrained to follow the motion of the Sun, drinking in its enormous energies and spewing out useful electricity.

As men exhaust more and more natural resources in the form of coal and oil, they must learn to tap the inexhaustible power reserves which a bountiful Nature provides. The Solar cell—along with atomic energy—will do the job!



To The Stars



by R. G. ST. CLAIR

IT'S rather precipitous to speculate about going to the stars when we haven't even gotten to a space station, much less the Moon. But for the sake of the record, it's worth considering the possibilities—and in some respects, like the journeys to the planets, a star-trip is almost easier than that first hard step upward from Earth.

Most science fiction authors have

solved a stellar voyage very neatly by making of the ship a self-contained system in which, if necessary, generations could be born and could die, to achieve their end—the landing on a planetary system of some star. As a matter of fact, this isn't a fictional concept at all. It is rooted in common sense and logic and we can look forward some day to the interstellar trip

being made in exactly that way. Time overcomes even the incredible distances between the stars.

Propulsion though, hasn't generally been considered as closely as it might. Undoubtedly by the time men are ready to make such trips, atomic power will have been applied to space travel. Even if the engines so developed are not capable of exerting the very great thrusts—usually connected with chemical rockets, they still will be able to do the job. For it must be remembered that each dyne of thrust adds to the velocity of the interstellar ship, and consequently its speed would increase tremendously even though the thrust were

feeble. This fact, perhaps more than any other (chemical fuels are out!) lends credence to the idea of the trip.

It has been suggested that a variant of light-beam propulsion might be used. Nor is this to be smiled at. Atomics might apply here as well. Interstellar travel is almost to be a certainty granting the success of Solar travel. There will be adventurers and scientists who will be unable to resist the lure of the stars, regardless of what a life-time commitment they make. *Ad Astra* will be their slogan if generations of unborn must attain their goal—to the stars!

* * *



"They only know one word of English — but it's the right one!"

...so very dark



A terrible plague struck North America to its knees; it was fear — the overpowering fear of darkness — which turned sane men into maniacs! . . .

PRESIDENT ARTHURSON stood irresolutely in the doorway of the rooftop communications shack, out of range of the automatic pickup camera.

His uniform was wrinkled and soiled; his face grim in its lack of expression. His sloping shoulders, bending as though under the imponderable weight of their five stars, were altogether congruous with his gaunt, tired figure.

In the view screen, strained concern was written in sober lines on the Soviet Foreign Minister's face as he wrung his hands in sympathetic desperation.

"But there must be *something more* we can do!" he said in a coarse guttural accent.

The Russian's figure wavered as the transpolar signal picked up arctic interference (Arthurson marveled over the fact that the microwave towers were still intact) and steadied as Secretary of State James Peterman made an adjustment.

"I am directed to assure you, Mr. Karovsky," said Peterman stiffly, "that the United States is

fully appreciative—"

"Hang all the protocol!" Karovsky declared impatiently. "Calculated diplomacy is only for normal times."

Peterman laughed bitterly. "You're right — in a country that's been ravaged in three weeks . . ." His voice broke off despairingly.

President Arthurson watched the Russian's face twitch on the brink of tortured solicitude. Then Karovsky smiled maudlinly.

"I am Ivor—Comrade Ivor. We have called each other many things across the conference table. But now let us make it simply 'Ivor' and 'James'."

Arthurson shook his head wearily. Only a month earlier—a life time, it seemed—the Soviet diplomat had confronted Peterman at the Bern talks on Latvian independence. He had shaken his fists and his face had flushed as he ignored tactful discretion in his tirade against the United States and its embryonic artificial satellite program. He had shouted about Russian nuclear power, armed might, global deployment.

But now—

"Again," Karovsky pleaded, "Generalissimo Vasilov insists that you accept temporary occupancy of a portion of our territory east of the Ural Mountains."

"The ten thousand square miles in Siberia?"

Karovsky grimaced palliatively. "Perhaps it is not the best area in all Russia, but, by the Great Stalin, James our first obligation is to see that our own people are not infected!"

Peterman smiled grimly. "It is a most benevolent gesture. The English—"

"The English—*bah!* They, like all the other countries outside the Western Hemisphere, guard their shores so that any American or Latin who flees the terror will not find succor!"

"Russia is kind. But it would be impossible to evacuate."

Karovsky looked down hopelessly. "There is something so pitiful in all this. It is not good to see a country as mighty as Russia herself so—completely helpless."

But then the Russian's chin jutted out arrogantly and his fierce eyes burned with impassioned resolution. "But, James, this is our pledge: The Soviet Union will stand protectively by the United States!"

He drove his fist into his palm. "We shall keep our armed might in

readiness should there be any opportunist power seeking to take advantage of your indisposition!"

Peterman stared gratifyingly at the screen. "You will continue your relief operations?"

"Ceaselessly! There will be an unending flow of medical supplies and food concentrates . . . for as long as there are people in your population centers to gather them up after we drop them."

LEANING AGAINST the parapet, the President studied Peterman as he walked suddenly from the shack. There was a yellow cast to his face, magnified in sickly proportion by a dull orange sun that vacillated close to the skyline in the west. Peterman—portly in appearance, ebullient . . . once. Now there were excessive folds in his clothes and a grimness in his voice whenever he spoke. But it was more than exhaustion that dulled his expression. It was the half-suppressed but relentless fear that bored up constantly from deep within.

"Ten thousand square miles in—Siberia," Arthurson muttered. "Government by remote control. The people stay here . . ." He spread his arm over the desolation that extended beyond the roof-top, ". . . while what's left of executive government turns tail and—"

"It's a feasible idea, John," Pe-

terman protested laconically. "We preserve a nucleus of government."

"Siberia!" Arthurson repeated tonelessly.

The Secretary's lips drew taut. "What would *we* do if our positions were reversed? Offer *them* New York and Washington?"

Around them lay the six unimpressive structures that comprised the Provisional Capitol of the United States. Ten thousand troops—remnant of the country's scattered and disorganized armed potential—congregated in tense, silent clusters, half of them manning gun positions that circled the group of buildings. Beyond the soldiers, throngs of civilians were eddying masses that paused only to stare covetously at a score of generator trucks parked randomly about the protected grounds.

"We *may* be able to get together enough ships for the evacuation," Peterman suggested.

"It's dark on the ocean at—night," Arthurson reminded somberly.

The Secretary fell into a strained silence. Then, "Even if we could evacuate, you wouldn't allow it, would you?"

The President turned irksomely toward him. "We must not forget the differences that existed for more than a generation—"

Peterman laughed hollowly. "Can't your attitude be anything

but distrust? Isn't it possible they might be sincere; that we just *could* have been mistaken about them?"

One of the mobile generators started up—a muffled *chug-chug* that intruded harshly on the desolate silence of the gathering dusk. It fed power to a necklace of floodlights strung like Christmas tree ornaments on one of the buildings.

From somewhere near the center of the city came the faint chatter of machine gun fire. It was answered by a fusillade of single shots.

Outside the ring of troops, thousands worked feverishly to build two huge piles of combustible material. Like insects, they formed queues to bring their offerings of splintered furniture, planks, doors, sections of walls to the mounds.

The sun had already set.

"Until I'm told what's responsible for this—plague," Arthurson said obstinately, "I'll reserve my opinion of Russia and every other nation that is not infected."

Peterman swore. "If they're behind this, why haven't they attacked?"

"Maybe they're avoiding infection."

"Then what was there to gain by infecting us in the first place? Wars of annihilation are feasible only on paper."

Arthurson frowned in submis-

sion to his confusion. "I don't know, Jim."

SMOKE ROSE sluggishly into the darkening sky from raw fires all over the city and the President closed his eyes bitterly against the appalling spectacle. It was the gradual burning of a country to make light. But what would happen when there was nothing left to burn?

Vapid cheers rose from below and he looked down to see torches being hurled into the kindling of the two bonfires. The flames spread hungrily and thousands crowded into the area between the fiery mounds. Inside the defense line, additional strings of floodlights bathed the reservation with their milky effluence as other mobile generators were started.

A colonel strode across the rooftop; drew up and saluted. "Sir, Brinker reports his gas convoy was overpowered at the state line."

Another problem. Another crucial defeat in the hopeless struggle to ward off complete annihilation. Arthurson accepted the news with numb indifference.

"How many trucks lost?"

"Eight. But Anatol's convoy is due tomorrow."

"Send out an escort to meet it."

The colonel squinted apprehensively at the sky. "Now sir?"

"In the morning." The President

smiled humorlessly.

The other backed anxiously toward the roof exit. "Aren't you coming down?"

But before Arthurson could answer, he was gone.

The first stars were faint prominences in an ash-colored sky. Gossamer purple and gold variegations above the western horizon were the only vestige of day.

Below, a man's coarse screams suddenly became a frightening, forlorn stridency in the still twilight as he broke away from the fringe of the fireside throng and raced toward the line of troops. Even in the dim light, only hopeless insanity was manifest in his twisted features.

"Halt!" cried a soldier as rifles raised to the ready.

But, hypnotized by the lights, the man only increased the fury of his charge.

One of the rifles spat a miniature tongue of flame and the on-rusher collapsed.

"Damn!" Arthurson exclaimed disgustedly. "Do we *have* to shoot them down?"

"There are no institutions readily available, you know." Peterman said cynically.

They were silent a moment. Then the Secretary lurched erect. "God! It's almost night!"

He started for the stairs—calmly at first. Then he broke into a

sprint. Arthurson followed, trying to stifle the impulse to race blindly down the five flights. But instinct, magnified by God-only-knows-what, engulfed him in a vortex of terror and he stumbled frenziedly toward the exit, turning frightened eyes toward the almost black sky. The dreadful darkness was more horrible than the spectre of death itself. It was an irrational, nameless fear that could strike a man mad if he didn't find —light.

President Arthurson plunged desperately down the stairs toward the sanctuary of illumination below.

THE PROVISIONAL Capitol of the United States was housed in the six main buildings of a college on the fringe of the metropolitan area. Less than a month earlier, fall registration had drawn long lines of luggage-laden undergraduates to its dormitories. Three days later, the same students had streamed out again—driven before the persistent tide of an unknown terror that materialized wherever there was darkness that *might* conceal lurking things.

Each night the terror was more severe.

Abandoned because it was one of the expendable adjuncts of civilization, and relatively preserved from general chaos because of its

location away from the city proper, the campus remained depressively gaunt and desolate for more than two weeks.

Then, as a result of an increment of mechanical difficulties, the convoy bearing the remnants of national government occupied the facilities. Congress had been dissolved but a week when the inability to maintain electrical generating facilities forced the withdrawal of the President and his staff. It had been a retreat that was to no small extent influenced by the pressure of multitudes who converged on Washington as though they might find protection there.

And so once more the campus was alive—alive with a populace manacled to the singular function of resisting the overwhelming dread that was omnipresent between dusk and dawn.

Now, in the emboldening brightness of day, the campus was quiet. Haggard troops slept on the damp ground, disdaining the protection of pup tents. (Thick canvas held out so much light!) Other soldiers, heads nodding sleepily, maintained watch at their stations.

On the quadrangle, a detail of grim-faced men worked torpidly with picks and shovels, routing a shallow trench. Like the last in a row of cultivated furrows, it extended from building to building. Simple communal crosses marked

the beginning and end of nine other furrows that were filled and mounded—tumuli for civilians and soldiers alike.

Beyond the line of defense, the bonfires still burned while the thousands who had huddled in their flickering light through the long hours of darkness were already gathering kindling for the next night's fires.

President Arthurson, standing by the window of one of the classrooms, crimped his nose at the stench borne on the smoke. For a while, the custom of burial had continued out there—until the magnitude of physical labor required of the survivors precluded the conventionality. Now the flames served an auxiliary function—as pyres.

Ignoring the fetid odors, Arthurson let the bright sunlight wash down on him. It was as though, he reflected, all humanity had suddenly evolved into a cult of sunworshippers.

Regretfully, he turned his back on the daylight and faced the ener-vated group who sat, legs askew and backs arched, at the desks. He sighed, as though disinclined to start the meeting.

"Colonel, what is our gasoline situation?"

Straightening in his chair, the uniformed man bleakly surveyed his fingernails. "We're good for

five or six days, providing today's convoy gets through."

"Would you recommend trying to station a detachment of troops at the refinery?"

"The refinery's tanks, sir, are empty."

Momentarily, the President's face sagged. Then he said hopefully, "We'll find another source."

He turned to the newly appointed Secretary of Communications. "Clark, what's the report from Obispo?"

THE MENTION of his name snapped Clark awake and his head came up from the desk. "None since yesterday noon. Their signal's faded out."

"That means contact is lost completely with the West too?"

"Contact, sir, is lost with practically everything. We are still in communication only with Missile Launching Site Four."

Masking his dejection, the President turned quickly toward General Manor. "How's the men's morale?"

"Fairly good," said the general, not at all enthusiastically. "Unfortunately, morale has no effect on whether you're the next one who'll go mad . . . Naturally, our losses to insanity are mounting."

"You're still banishing the mental casualties?"

Manor nodded. "It's the only

way we can preserve order. But I'd prefer doing our own mercy killings, rather than forcing the job on those poor jokers outside."

Arthurson crossed over to the desk at the head of the room; dropped wearily into the chair.

"Gentlemen," he said sullenly, "how can a civilization crumble beneath our feet with such utter speed?"

"The explanation's simple," Interior Secretary Rault offered. "You stay awake all night—terrified, desperately afraid the light you've managed to provide will go out. Morning comes. You've no time for anything but the immediate necessity of food, more light for the next night, grabbing whatever sleep you can get, only because you must have it."

He tossed a thumb over his shoulder, indicating one of the staff members slumped over his desk.

"Power production is out," he went on. "Mines are too dark for anybody to go down into them, even if the crews were sufficiently organized for some sort of operations. Refineries are severed from their crude oil sources . . . Then you count the eighteen cities, as of a week ago, gutted by fires out of control; thousands—*millions* killed over the length and breadth of the Hemisphere as an indirect result of—God knows what."

"At least," offered a man with the caduceus of the Medical Corps on his collar, "we're more or less convinced that the 'God knows what' is not pathological."

Arthurson looked down at Doctor Sharron. "But haven't we decided that it is a disease?"

"An unprecedented disease," Sharron asked dubiously, "that crops up almost universally, as though it were started by a stopwatch?"

He shook his head. "I think we would do better to aim our suspicions along the lines of an epidemic psychosis."

"Mass hypnotism?" the President suggested.

SHARRON ROSE and began pacing. "The fear of darkness—nyctophobia. There's a bit of it in all of us. We repress it—some of us more completely than others. But the fear is still there— inhibited. Now suppose something could kindle that fear; magnify it until it's utterly out of proportion to all other considerations whenever the stimulus of darkness is present?"

"But what would magnify it?" Arthurson asked.

Sharon shrugged helplessly.

"And how can you be sure it isn't caused by a communicative organism?"

"Yesterday, sir, the foraging patrol brought in a man who is not

afflicted with nyctophobia, who *does not* fear the dark."

Arthurson stared unbelievingly at him.

"You see," Sharron continued, "the man cannot fear darkness, cannot *know* darkness because he is blind."

"Then he lives *only* in darkness."

"On the contrary. He has never experienced darkness, having never encountered contrasting light. He has been blind since birth."

The President stared silently at the doctor. "And that proves our plague isn't pathological?"

"Have you ever heard of a disease that can discriminate between attitudes in a patient? That knows whether a prospective victim is *potentially* a darkness-fearer or will subsequently prove to be immune to its morbid effects?"

Sharron shook his head disparagingly. "I'm afraid you should have included a psychiatrist on your staff."

"But if it's a universal psychosis," Arthurson asked anxiously, "what's responsible for it? Can it be a purposely induced mass hysteria?"

The doctor shrugged noncommittally.

A voice became audible in the second row as a major, wearing the insignia of staff, leaned toward the man next to him. "What were you

saying about one of your assistants sighting something?"

The man addressed was Ernest Felton, former Chief Astronomer of the abandoned artificial satellite program.

"It was nothing," he said. "That was before we left Washington. Plucky kid. Had enough guts to look through the 'scope that night. Said he saw a star being eclipsed—then another. But it was just the incipient stage of insanity. He went completely mad later that night when our power failed during a storm."

Arthurson, suddenly attentive, confronted the astronomer. "The Russians, too, have a satellite program," he reminded.

"But an immediate radar check showed nothing up there, sir," Felton insisted.

A volley of shots exploded outside and the President glanced through the window; watched a band of civilians, their arms spread defenselessly, draw up at a respectable distance from the line of troops.

"We surrender," shouted one who appeared to be the leader. "Take us in."

"This is restricted territory," gruffly explained a sergeant in a grimy uniform.

The man glanced beyond the sergeant—at the generators, at the numerous floodlight reflectors.

"I'm coming in." He started forward.

Rifles were leveled. Bolts clicked.

Infuriated, the man turned and strode away, the others following.

Arthurson looked down dejectedly at his hands. "Can't they understand? Don't they realize we can't take *anybody* in? That to accept one would mean to accept tens of thousands? That it would be the end of representative government?"

"Are you sure *you* would understand?" Peterman asked dryly.

THE SECRETARY of State turned up the screen's brilliance control. The additional light forced back furtive shadows in the corners of the shack. Visibly relieved, he turned to face the Soviet Foreign Minister.

"Please try to understand our position," he said obsequiously. "Under the circumstances, there is naturally much anxiety. And there is still suspicion."

Karovsky winced. "Suspicion—of us?" he asked incredulously.

"Of your possible complicity in the epidemic."

The Russian drew back in pain-ed disbelief.

"I assure you," Peterman added apologetically, "those sentiments are in the negligible minority. But the mistrustful should have their doubts relieved."

"What is it you want reassurance on?"

"Day before yesterday we were told an object had been sighted in our skies. It was a completely unreliable report. But it drew attention to your space satellite program."

Karovsky laughed. "And you believe we have perhaps completed our project and are now anchored out there to witness your agonies?"

Peterman shrank embarrassedly. "There are those who thought the satellite, or perhaps a space craft . . ." He faltered. I don't believe it, of course. Nor does the great majority. And competent radar checks showed there was nothing. But—"

"I assure you," the Russian said with utmost sincerity, "there is nothing up there for which we could possibly be responsible. Shortly after your plague struck, interest in the satellite declined. Only yesterday Generalissimo Vasilov ordered the undertaking abandoned, realizing there will be no need for such a defensive project for generations."

Peterman was surprised. "You're not going to construct the satellite?"

"Quite the opposite. Already we have begun dismantling. We should be glad to relay pictures onto your screen of the dismantling

process."

"No—of course not," the Secretary said contritely. "We don't intend to magnify the courtesy by asking for proof."

"We decided to abandon the project," Karovsky went on, "when it was realized the enormous task we shall face in attempting to rehabilitate half a world."

"Russia is planning a rehabilitation program?" Peterman asked reverently.

Karovsky smiled. "Not at the moment. Our first consideration is self-protection in case of infection. But when the plague is over, Russia will work toward the restoration of America as diligently as though it were our own country which was affected."

Peterman stared in awe.

"It is not an entirely humane consideration," Karovsky grinned fraternally. "We are quite aware that without a productive America, the world would be set back three hundred years."

The Secretary started and spun around as a form suddenly appeared in the doorway and cast a shadow against the wall. It was a messenger.

"The President wants to see you, sir," said the sergeant.

LISTLESSLY, PRESIDENT Arthurson paced the weed-bracketed walk in front of the admin-

istration building. But despite the languor, there was an impatience in his slow stride. He turned at the end of the walk; saw Peterman approaching, and hurried to meet him.

"Jim Clark reported one of his men picked up a broadcast out of Goose Bay, Newfoundland, on a short wave band."

"Call for help?"

"No. They're *all right* up there!"

"The plague is over?" Peterman asked excitedly.

"Never had it to any extent. They've reported some sort of a plague boundary though. Where they are, they experience only a mild nyctophobia. Going south, however, an exploration party reported increasing fear of darkness until it became unbearable about three hundred miles from Goose Bay."

"Which indicates—?"

"That, as Sharron contends, we're wrong in suspecting a disease. Whatever it is, it affects a definite area. Those in the area are victims. The farther in, the greater the effects. When they leave the contaminated section, they are cured completely."

Peterman cupped his chin thoughtfully. "Central America," he recalled aloud, "felt the effects first. Disorganization in our Southland became complete long before the top half of the country

. . . We could pack up and strike out for Goose Bay."

"Even if that were a feasible idea, Jim, we couldn't try it. Encamped here, we can protect our equipment. But on the march, we would be decimated. Anyway, without a government the United States would be an open country."

"I don't think anybody would walk in and take over," the Secretary said crudely.

"Don't you now, Mr. Peterman?" the President shot back. "Are you still naive enough to believe that this plague—with all its regularity and systematism, its totality and incredible lack of randomness—is a natural occurrence?"

"I can think of nothing *unnatural* that would produce the same results. Nor can any of your advisers."

"The fact that we can't conceive of an *unnatural* cause is unfortunately our own inadequacy." Arthurson was almost shouting and his face had reddened noticeably.

Peterman folded his arms obdurately. "So Vasilov and the rest of the Politburo are long-range Sven-galis, seated behind the Kremlin wall and beaming hypnotic impulses at us?"

Arthurson forcibly calmed himself. "My suspicions," he warned delicately, "would require but a modicum of substantiation before I would give the order to strike

back with every guided missile at my disposal."

"The Russians have abandoned their satellite program. Do you know why?"

The President waited.

"Because," the other continued expositarily, "they are planning a relief and rehabilitation program for the United States that will, for years to come, overshadow any other item on their budget."

Arthurson's face twitched under the impact of exasperating perplexity.

AN EARLY night was falling as ominous shadows coalesced beneath a blanket of writhing stratuscumulus clouds. It was the type of murky evening on which they would have started up the generators long before it was time. Only, now the gasoline supply was critically low and their considerations were on the possibility of rationing, rather than liberal consumption.

Off the campus, the nocturnal fires had already started—timorous vigil lights of hope on an altar of despair that sent up their smoke to darken further the dismal overcast.

In the distance, an entire section of the city east of the river was ablaze, its fierce flames suffusing in lower strata of clouds with a palpable blood-like tinge.

The fetidness of putrefaction and the stench of burning flesh were a stifling mustiness in the air over the campus as President Arthurson stared at the sky and fought a welling dread.

He considered giving the order to start the generators. But he couldn't override Manor's directive without displaying his lesser valor.

His eyes cast wildly about, stabbing at the forbidding shadows among the recesses of the buildings; in the shrubbery; beneath the vehicles. *Nothing* was there! he told himself. What *could* be hidden in the darkness—monsters, grotesque nightmares, lurking animals? He laughed, but it was a mirthless gesture. Hadn't he known darkness all his life? Hadn't he been convinced, as a child, that there was nothing to fear?

Still, rationalization could not dispel the overwhelming sense of horror. It was no tangible terror—nothing he could fight—nothing against which he could muster and direct courage. Nevertheless, knowing that his fears were logically baseless made the terror no less severe.

Such were the effects of nyctophobia.

Arthurson turned toward the bonfires. Merely staring at their light gave partial rebirth to courage. For a while, he watched a detachment of soldiers, much closer

to the emboldening fires than he, as they completed covering the graves which had received the previous night's casualties.

Night—blackness—terror—night—terror.... the words and their awful concepts reverberated in his mind until they became a torture.

He moved over to where General Manor stood with the generator crews. Wasn't his sanity more valuable than demonstrating a boldness he didn't possess? Wouldn't he gain the gratitude of the men by ordering the lights on?

But as he approached, Manor's voice rose in the desperately awaited order, "All right, boys. Start 'em up."

PETERMAN AND Dr. Sharron
followed him inside the building into a heavily carpeted and ornately furnished room that had once been the dean's office. Only, now its plush chairs and polished bookcases went unnoticed in a garish glare of intense illumination. A string of unfrosted light bulbs stretched from wall to wall to supplement the inadequate glow of fluorescent fixtures. Three lamps burned on the desk. From every wall outlet wires trailed to lamp-stands feeding additional multi-watt bulbs. A commercial clock with a gaudily illuminated face guarded against shadows in one

corner behind a bookcase. In another corner a partly dismantled neon sign blinked alternate red ("Thirsty?") and green ("Try A Nectacola").

Arthurson closed the door after the other two had entered. He went over to the desk. Muffled gunfire erupted outside. He shut his eyes as though he could dismiss the thought image of panic-stricken men being cautioned to stay back but ignoring the warning in their madness.

There was a scream. The shooting stopped.

Sharron paced nervously in front of the desk as the President absently watched him.

"I'm wondering, gentlemen," said the doctor, "whether you've noticed another development in our affliction. Until now it has required the presence of darkness to stimulate fear—the greater the darkness, the more intense the fear. Until, presumably and demonstrably, darkness for any appreciable length of time means insanity."

He stopped and leaned over the desk to stare grimly at Arthurson. "But now it's pretty generally the case with the men I've spoken to that the simple *thought* of darkness suffices to touch off the symptoms of *nyctophobia*."

Peterman came over and sat on the edge of the desk. "There's

truth in what you say. But it's probably an exaggeration. Naturally, when you think of something that causes fear, anxiety results."

Sharron smiled glumly. "Try it, gentlemen. Concentrate on darkness."

Arthurson imagined himself in a black cave.

A numbing terror flowed instantly over him, crushing him with a suffocating, bewildering force. It was more than a vicarious fear! It was as though he actually were in the ebony cavern, being ground down under the paralysis of soul-wrenching fright!

"God!" he muttered, snapping erect.

Peterman was on his feet, his face ashen and his arms trembling. "What does it mean?"

"Simple," explained the doctor, "that our phobia is becoming worse. At first, there was merely a feeling of uneasiness in the dark. Later, we found ourselves avoiding dark; running to get back to lighted areas. Then darkness became unbearable. Now it's developing that the physical stimulus can be supplanted by the *thought* of the stimulus—with the same results."

"That suggests conditioned behavior, doesn't it?" the President asked.

"An attitude, sir, can hardly suffice as a substitute stimulus for conditioned reaction . . . No, there

is something very direct and positive about this new development. Something we can't hope to define until we at least explain the basic syndrome."

Arthurson swiveled around in the chair and stared out the window—into the lurking blackness of the night sky that was so inadequately held back by primitive fires and a battery of only slightly more substantial floodlights.

IT WAS QUIET outside. An ominous quiet interrupted only by the whine of the building's mobile generator outside the window and the frightened wails of women who pressed in close around the fires. Mournful sounds that rose like the forlorn murmurs of a desolate wind-swept sea—a black sea . . . a black wintery sea at midnight, deprived even of starlight by an impenetrable layer of Stygian storm clouds that—

Shaking, Arthurson held back a scream and forced the maddening thoughts from his mind.

Suddenly a barrage of shots.

Slugs ricocheted against the masonry of the building. The garrison was under attack!

Whistles blew and the President watched reinforcements rush to their gun positions. Superior fire-power answered the attackers—a small group of men who stood unprotected at the nearby street in-

tersection, firing recklessly.

Abruptly, the lights in the room flickered!

Sharron shouted in dismay. Peterman and Arthurson stared apprehensively at the ceiling bulbs then at each other. Slowly the lights dimmed as the whine of the generator outside the window dropped in pitch. One of the slugs must have hit it!

Terrified, Arthurson raced into the hall where the lights were still dimming. He sprinted for the exit, Sharron and Peterman close behind. As he neared the bend in the corridor, the filaments in the overhead bulbs were only pale embers.

Then they were extinguished altogether!

Sharron screamed as he stumbled into the President and, together, they flailed against the wall and collapsed. Peterman tumbled down on top of them.

Total darkness! A nightmare of horror! A thousand lurking things could be all around them—ready to strike out of the blackness! The corridor could be endless! Or, when they got outside, they might still find no light!

"Light!" Peterman screamed.

Arthurson thrust a hand into his pocket, found his cigarette lighter. Lunging to his feet finally, he struck it as the incubus of insanity-provoking fear tore merci-

lessly at the fibers of his mind.

The wick flared and he reeled forward, its light almost blinding him. Sharron pressed in close and reached for the lighter. Arthurson jerked it away, his eyes casting in panic at their shadows leaping on the wall.

Again he broke into a run. The wind blew the flame out. Terrified, he struck it up once more. But Peterman's hand darted out and knocked the lighter from his grasp.

Blackness!

Sobbing, the President fell to his knees, desperately groped for the only barrier that stood between them and lunacy. Sharron tripped over him and collided with Peterman. Then the three were on the floor again.

Unbearable horror sapped at Arthurson's sanity until he scarcely heard Sharron's mad whimpers and Peterman's hoarse screams.

Then the hall lights came on—with a dazzling brilliancy.

Exhausted, still paralyzed with fright, they lay motionless.

"All right in there?" someone shouted solicitously from outside.

"Your generator konked," another voice added. "But we hooked you in on an emergency circuit."

TIRIED AND HAGGARD, the President sat on the lawn, his head bowed and his temples booming relentlessly with the hollow

drumbeats of prolonged sleeplessness. A warm sun, unnatural in its unbelievable brilliance, was half up in the sky. He stared at it, too listless to shield his eyes . . . If only he could sleep! If only he could banish his anxiety over the next night's ordeal!

General Manor, jowls sagging and eyelids heavy, walked wearily over and sat beside Arthurson.

"Sharron?" the President asked.

Manor shook his head regretfully.

"Any hope?"

"I'm afraid not. It wasn't his first experience. He was caught out with that patrol last week—remember? They had only the headlights of the jeep. That shattered him pretty well. This last experience . . . well, that did it."

"Did you—release him?"

"So that mob out there," he asked, nodding toward the smoldering bonfires, "can administer the mercy shot? No. We'll hold him a day or two. There's a chance he might snap out of it. If he doesn't, we'll give him relief." He patted the holster at his waist.

"How many other casualties last night?"

"Sixty-eight, sir."

"Dead?"

"Sixteen killed themselves. Twenty-two were slain by nyctophobes. Another seventeen were so violent they had to be shot."

"The rest?"

"The other thirteen were hopelessly mad and had to be turned out."

Arthurson stared compassionately at the fire-builders. They were so noticeably fewer than only a week earlier! He hadn't realized that the suicides, the killing of the sane by the insane and the insane by the sane, the other casualties had exacted so horrible a toll.

"We haven't had any report from Anatol, sir," Manor said ominously.

"Then I suppose we can write him off as lost. What's the situation?"

"Enough fuel left for three days."

"Then we join the fire-builders?"

"Starting tonight, with your permission, we consolidate; pull in. Feed fewer circuits; burn fewer lights; abandon half of the generators. If there's still no word from Anatol tomorrow, we'll cut down to one building, three generators. That way we might stretch our reserve a couple of weeks."

The general left. Three faint, straight-line streams of mist, high in the stratosphere, caught Arthurson's eye. He watched their points extend southward, like chalk marks against a deep-blue blackboard . . . Russian mercy planes. It wasn't the first time he had spied them.

"You never see any of them up

there at night, do you, sir?"

A Headquarters sergeant was standing next to him, neck straining upward too.

"Do you suppose," he went on, "they're afraid of our dark—like the Newfoundlanders . . . afraid, but for some reason hiding their fear from Mr. Peterman?"

Arthurson studied the man. His face was drawn, grubby. But somehow a smile clung to it. He was about forty, but the creases of sickly exhaustion beneath his eyes, the furrows on his forehead added another twenty years to his apparent age.

He dropped down beside the President. "We were talking a while ago about this fear stuff. I thought you might be interested. I was saying I might be able to offer an explanation. The men had a good laugh."

Arthurson looked at him indulgently.

"I said," he continued, "that I knew of only one other case where a man could be made afraid without any apparent cause. That was twenty years ago when I was an exchange student at Heidelberg University. There was a Doctor Von Slater conducting some unorthodox experiments on human emotions. He had found a way to stimulate emotional reaction by exciting certain areas of the brain with what he called 'modulated

psychosimulative impulses."

The President straightened, attentive.

The sergeant smiled. "He had made a career out of encephalic wave analysis. He had discovered, in his words, 'a special component of energy not unlike electromagnetic current and having some of the properties of electromagnetic current, which is essential to all thought processes—conscious and subconscious'."

He drew a deep breath and laughed. "Von Slater found that this energy was spectromatic—that certain frequencies matched certain attitudes or emotions. He succeeded in duplicating this psychoelectric flow and controlling its frequency. He could make a subject laugh, cry, shout belligerently, cower.

"He explored the phobic areas and, by adjustment of the modulated impulses, could make the subject specifically afraid of almost anything. I took a turn as guinea pig and, in the space of a few minutes, found myself suffering from claustrophobia, agoraphobia—even triskaidekaphobia . . . that's the fear of the number thirteen."

The sergeant was thoughtfully silent a moment. "Von Slater," he went on finally, "didn't last long though. He was a pretty mean cuss to begin with. And there was

a good deal of resentment against the type of work he was doing. The academy decided it was too inhumane and barred him. Then the university dismissed him."

PETERMAN STOOD boldly in front of the President's desk, his stiff finger extended toward the sergeant.

"And merely on the basis of what this man says," he demanded, "you would indict an entire country?"

"You'll admit," Arthurson insisted, "that Von Slater could have left Germany and been accepted by the Russians."

"Good Lord, man! There isn't anyone less anxious than you to find a cause for this—plague. But to grab the first explanation because it appeases your inherent aversion to another power . . . There isn't another man among us who has heard of a Doctor Von Slater and a — a psychosimulative wave!"

Arthurson squared his shoulders; stared silently over the room—at Peterman, General Manor, Interior Secretary Rault, Chief Astronomer Felton, all the other staff members. "I expect that we will defend ourself with every facility at our disposal." It was an interdiction to each one.

The men glanced uncertainly at one another.

"Isn't it possible," the President asked pleadingly, "that Russia is using such devices?"

"It seems to me," Rault offered, "that if they have such machines, they could quite easily set them to stimulate suicidal behavior. Overnight we'd all kill ourselves. Why bother with a slow death of insanity?"

"You're wrong, Harry." Arthurson was adamant. "If we wanted to take over Russia, we certainly wouldn't kill everybody off. Perhaps a sizable proportion to insure easy enslavement. But a barren and completely depopulated Russia wouldn't be any use to a conqueror. People are a commodity too."

"But if they're responsible," Peterman spread his arms, "why haven't they come in and taken over? What are they waiting for?"

"Sufficient deterioration to a point where it will provide optimum convenience for them . . . As Mr. Rault suggested, they could have decided on universal suicide. But that wouldn't have given them a chance to demonstrate solicitude for us. World suspicion would have been on them. Don't believe that a conquering nation doesn't care whether it will enjoy the sanction of future generations. I think selecting nyctophobia and gradual deterioration was their best course. Through sympathy, they gain our confidence; they

hold off retaliation that might come from missile arsons, and they lay the groundwork for establishing a pre-emptory claim over the devastated United States by supervising a giant relief and rehabilitation program."

"I can't see it that way, John—" Peterman began.

"That's an honest difference of opinion, I'm sure. But while we try to decide whether there is Russian complicity, our deterioration becomes more complete. Even now, we are beginning to be afraid of just shadows, rather than total darkness."

Peterman sighed submissively. "What would you suggest?"

Arthurson recapitulated, "We suspect Russia's behind the plague, but we don't want to retaliate because we're not sure. There's no proof. And their attitude is so sympathetic that, according to the consensus, simply to suspect them is unjust.

"But suppose tomorrow we release five or six nuclear missiles? Suppose we aim them at unpopulated areas—just in case we're wrong? Then, after we've demonstrated our ability to strike back, we announce we're aware of their psychosimulative impulses . . . If they're responsible, we should see immediate results. If we don't, we can apologize for the attack and say it was the work of a madman."

Peterman slapped the desk irately. "But suppose they're not responsible and tell us so? Will you refuse to believe them?"

Arthurson waved his arm impatiently. "We have nothing to lose. Even if, as you insist, the chance is only one in a thousand that my suspicion is correct, it's worth taking that chance as a final alternative to complete destruction Mister Clark, have your men contact the remaining missiles detail and tell them to stand by."

IN THE LAVISH splendor of the East Reception Room of the Kremlin's Great Palace, Premier Vasilov reclined on a red velvet couch. His eyes swept indifferently over rich draperies and austere portraits of former rulers, bathed in the aura of the room's radiant brightness.

His corpulent hand dipped down into a silver fruit bowl. Little finger extended, he judiciously selected a grape from its cluster and, with delicate motions, peeled it and extracted the seeds. Cloyingly, he prodded it into his mouth.

"Yes, my dear comrades," he said, sighing, "how my sympathies do extend to our sister republic across the ocean. It is all so very sad."

He selected a succulent orange and punctured it carefully with a knife glancing in turn at Foreign

Minister Karovsky, Internal Information Minister Charasonich and Research Tcharnoff. The trio stared uncertainly at one another.

"Naturally," the Premier went on compassionately, "we cannot stand idly by while they are devastated by this horrible plague. What do you propose we do to alleviate their sufferings, Comrade Karovsky?"

The Foreign Minister's hand moved toward the fruit bowl. But he withdrew it sensitively under the Premier's acrimonious stare.

"I think perhaps," he answered dutifully, "we should extend the protection of the Kremlin. They need assistance so very badly. And they are so vulnerable to the designs of opportunist nations. How else could they manage to restore their country other than under our protective custody?"

Vasilov laughed vigorously and his flaccid body imparted the convulsive motion to the couch. "A very feasible idea, my dear Karovsky. I accord it my instant sanction. We shall prepare to send a rather large mercy party over immediately. It may require the equivalent of a small army to restore a semblance of order to so utterly devastated and disorganized a country."

"In addition to smaller mercy parties for the other nations of the Hemisphere, Excellency," Karo-

vsky reminded, smiling.

Through this sat the Internal Information Minister, his mouth open inanely as he stared puzzledly at the others. "But—but the plague!"

"Oh, haven't you heard, Comrade Charasonich?" Vasilov asked in utter sincerity. "Our inimitable scientists have not only found the cure for the disease, but they have also perfected an immunization process for those of our brave soldiers who must venture into the infested land with the injections for the survivors."

Charasonich was accordingly astounded. "Really?"

The other three laughed explosively.

"That will be all, Comrade Charasonich," said the Premier. "You will spread among the people the story of these scientific discoveries and you will tell them that our mercy party will leave within a week."

After Charasonich had gone, Vasilov turned to the Minister of Research. "A week should be about right, shouldn't it?"

Tcharnoff reflected a moment. "Within another day, at the most, the effects will reach maximum intensity, according to our revised estimate on power buildup within the device."

"Then we can dispose of the thing?"

Tcharnoff hesitated, glanced away from the Premier.

VASILOV'S FACE contorted reproachfully and he tossed the orange back into the bowl.

"*Something else* has gone wrong!" he accused.

"It's — nothing, Excellency. Nothing at all."

Vasilov made a fizzing sound, much like a fuse. "First," he shouted, "you erred in the application of the Von Slater device by predicting an entire year before maximum effect was achieved through a gradual buildup of solar power input—"

"But it was an unavoidable mistake!" Tcharnoff pleaded, fright in his eyes. "There was no way of knowing. Without previous experience, how could we guess the ionosphere would have an amplifying rather than a dampening effect on the waves?"

Premier Vasilov rose, his obese bulk in anger. "Are not our scientists the most advanced in the world? You should have preconceived that one month would be sufficient. The device should have been timed to disengage accordingly. As it is, we find ourselves faced with the necessity of having to go up there and turn it off to eliminate waiting another eleven months before occupying the stricken countries."

Tcharnoff shrank helplessly.

Vasilov threw his hands up despairingly. "Well, what is it this time? What other difficulties have we encountered?"

The minister of Research seemed to contract against an arm of the chair—on the side away from the Pacific. "It's nothing to cause any concern, Excellency. We are ready to haul down the device on an hour's notice. There's really nothing to fear."

"Out with it, Comrade!"

"The device, Excellency . . . It is—moving."

Vasilov started. "Moving! Where? How?"

"It is drifting west—but very slowly. You see, we failed to foresee that Von Slater's psychowaves might have a pseudo-material component of sufficient intensity to disturb the established orbit."

"You will explain further."

"Picture the device. It is much like a huge framework funnel with its tip aimed toward the earth—more correctly like a kinescopic tube. A television tube, Excellency. The solar converters and modulators are located at the mouth of the funnel, with the magnetic plates arranged along the sloping sides in such a manner as to mold the waves into a beam and shoot them out the tip.

"But, although it is very slight, there is an increment of repulsion

—a kickback which is very slowly recoiling the device farther out into space. As it moves out of its original 22,300-mile orbit, its constant velocity is insufficient to preserve its twenty-four-hour period. And it no longer maintains its exact position on the central meridian of the Western Hemisphere. It is receding westward."

"How long have you known this?" Vasilov demanded.

"Only a few days. We surmised its movement and deduced what had happened when it was learned that the Hawaiian Islands had come under its influence. At the same time the eastern tip of South America began to move out from beneath the cone. You see, the device's period has been shortened to something like twenty-three and a half hours."

Foreign Minister Karovsky leaped to his feet. "Is there any danger to Russia?"

"Of course not," Tcharnoff scoffed. "Even at an accelerated recession, it could not leave the United States in less than five or six days. It could not reach us in less than three weeks. But that makes no difference. Have we not already decided to retrieve the device within the week? Our three space crafts are ready to go out on a moment's notice."

Vasilov seemed somewhat mollified. "We are positive about ach-

ieving maximum effectiveness by tomorrow?"

"Quite, Excellency."

"Then today we shall assemble our—relief expedition. They shall be in readiness for the massive polar aircraft beginning tomorrow—immediately after you deactivate the device."

"BIG DOG to Sand Crab . . .
Big Dog to Sand Crab . . .
Come in, Sand Crab—"

Secretary of Communications Clark himself was at the portable transmitter on the rooftop. Arthurson and Peterman waited tensely behind him. But only the sputter of static came from the receiver.

Clark turned around apologetically. "It's like I tell you, sir. There won't be any answer. They were almost rebellious this morning when they said they were curtailing the use of their batteries on anything except producing light."

Arthurson ran an unsteady hand over his face. "Keep trying."

Clark turned back to the microphone.

"Give it up, John," pleaded the Secretary of State. "Maybe it's Divine intervention that's keeping us from reaching the missiles crew. They might not be satisfied with hurling just six of those things."

"I will not see this country go down without some sort of resistance—even if only token retaliati-

tion."

Peterman placed an arm around Arthurson's shoulder. "Let's go down and rest. It'll be dark in another five or six hours."

The President, however, walked over to the parapet and leaned over, looking at the haggard troops; the restless civilians in their eternal task of fire-building; the city, sections of it blazing out of control in the distance.

And he fought off a surging consternation as he let his gaze rest on the shadows cast across the ground by the buildings. Fear won and he jerked his stare away. It fell on his own shadow, cast across the blackened gravel of the roof. Instinctively alarmed, he wrenched his eyes skyward. Now there was no feeling of incipient dread. But the muffled clamor of angry kettle-drums was an inner fury of fatigue and Arthurson shook his head to clear it.

Suddenly, though, he was aware of a change in the auditory backdrop of screams and wails that rose from the masses outside—from the soldiers themselves. Always, it seemed, there had been the ever present undertide of frantic voices crying out in dismay. But now it was a stronger current; the screams were more frenzied, more numerous.

"Let's go down," he urged. "Something else is wrong!"

The lights in the stairwell burned brightly. But still the overall intensity was somewhat less than daylight. So it was with relief that Arthurson and Peterman emerged from the building. General Manor was just entering to meet them. There was only vexation on his face.

"It can't be fought, sir!" he said desperately. "It's a trend—another development of this nyctophobia!"

"What on earth are you talking about?" President Arthurson demanded.

A tempest of derisive shouts sounded off the campus and throngs raced forward in a headlong charge on the fortified positions. The troops along the line of defense opened fire.

Manor pushed the President and Peterman back into the building. "That's why they're attacking, sir. They've found out too. And they realize how hopeless everything is."

"Found out what?" Arthurson shouted above the din.

"It's more than a fear of darkness—more than a dread of shadows now, sir. Just close your eyes and you'll see."

Hesitantly, the President cupped his hands over his eyes.

Blackness!

Abjectly detestable, horrifying darkness!

He screamed and wrenched his

eyes open.

How long was it since he had slept? How long could he resist overpowering exhaustion? What would happen when he reached the point where he would be torn between near-unconsciousness and the utter necessity of remaining awake?

And night was coming!

LIGHTS BURNED brightly behind the pale pink bricks of the Kremlin's walls—burned with a feverish intensity. They fairly blazed in the East Reception Room of the Great Palace where Premier Vasilov had summoned more than a score of aides and high members of the Politburo.

His face was florid, his stout body shaking as he paced before them, seemingly unmindful of their presence. There was a rage in his eyes—something more than rage . . . fear.

His voice broke on a half-whimper as he stopped and turned to face them, singling out Research Minister Tcharnoff. "You will get it down immediately! Do you hear? *Immediately!*"

Near hysteria tinged his words.

Tcharnoff backed away until he became inconspicuous between the towering hulks of two Cossack generals.

Vasilov turned imploring eyes toward Foreign Minister Karovsky. "He did promise it would be down

by yesterday, didn't he? And it isn't down yet! Our mercy expedition has been waiting at the air fields for almost a full day . . . *Why hasn't it been taken down?*"

"We have been trying, Excellency," said Karovsky phlegmatically. "All day we have fired missiles at it. But even if the projectiles could reach the altitude, there would be no hope of destroying it. To avoid discovery by the enemy, it was made impervious to radar detection. None of our homing devices would work."

Vasilov's eyes were staring through the Foreign Minister. It was obvious that the explanation had made no impression on him.

"But why hasn't it been taken down?" His words were becoming dispassionate; his eyes duller. "Must we wait until it destroys itself eleven months hence? Must we—?"

The Premier's voice broke off and he hid his face in his hands. Apparently, intense emotional strain had already ravaged some vital area of the Generalissimo's rationality. But who would be the first to lay restraining hands on the great leader?

Tcharnoff turned puzzledly to

the Cossack general on his left. "I do not understand. Why is His Excellency so utterly disturbed?"

The general laid a finger on his lips. "Sh-h-h! Do you not know that Comrade Vasilov is a *natural nyctophobe*? How else could one conceive of such a clever plan as the space device?"

Suddenly the Premier's anguished voice boomed out in the room. "Turn up the lights! Dispatch the space ships! Knock that thing out of the sky!"

"We *have* sent up the ships, Excellency," Karovsky said patiently. "All of them."

For a moment, awareness returned to the Premier's stare. "But—but . . ."

"None of the spacemen has returned," the Foreign Minister explained. "One was heard muttering insanely before contact was lost with his ship."

"But why? What is wrong with them? Why can they not destroy the thing?"

"They are only human, Excellency. And, in space—where they must brave the full power of the device in order to approach it—it is dark . . . *so very dark*."

THE END

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STAR GIRL III



Kohler

"Hey, Max, this world's younger than we thought!"

* Science Is Easy! *

by S. A. MARIN

THE technological world is growing more and more complicated. Since the invention of radio, fewer and fewer people are attempting to understand how the miraculous gadgets around them work. They leave that to the technicians. Radar, TV, electronics, jet engines, atomics,—all these things appear to be far beyond the average person's capacity to understand. And of course, that's false, untrue, and a fat lie!

All of these things are established on very simple principles. In the aggregate they are complicated, but when reduced to principles, anyone who can read, can understand what makes the miracles around him tick. Television and radar for example admittedly are a complex apparatus. Broken down to essentials however, they are built up of things no more in-

volved than simple resistors, condensers, and ordinary vacuum tubes. Most people understand these things—put them together, and the principles behind the complicated electronic wizardry become clear.

Future technology is going to be a thousand-fold more complex—but this holds no terrors for one who wants to understand. It just means that more things have been put together.

A page of printed matter would awe and terrify an illiterate. But when he learns the alphabet, sees the creation of words, their connection into sentences, he realizes how easy it all is. Precisely the same ideas apply to the most abstract principles of science and mathematics. You start at the beginning, and very shortly you come to the end—the path is not very rough either.

* Universal Logic! *

by GEORGE ROSE

THE famous philosopher and co-discoverer (with Newton) of the calculus, Leibnitz, had a pet project which he cherished throughout his life. This was to reduce all reasoning to a sort of mechanical process by means of a set of symbols. Leibnitz wanted to create a "calculus of logic", working with symbols, much as algebra does. But

more than mathematics, this new science would encompass all reasoning, so that any problem could be solved by simply plugging in the right symbols and doing the right manipulations.

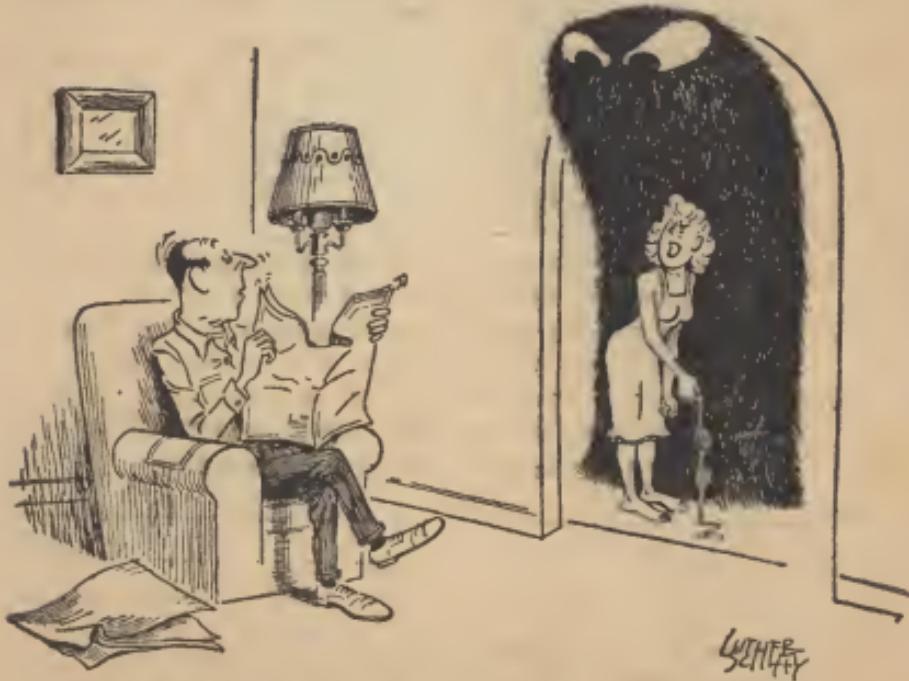
This grandiose scheme was not nearly as fantastic as it sounds. In fact, as time goes on, it appears as if Leibnitz had a very good idea.

The reason for this favorable review lies in the development of two things, a mathematical subject called "symbolic logic" and the ubiquitous computing machine, "the mechanical brain." Coupling these two ideas together gives something very akin to Leibnitz's scheme.

Naturally this symbolic logic is not the answer to the world's problems which Leibnitz thought it was. It can be applied only to specific problems. But how effectively it works. Insurance companies, telephone companies, and organizations noted for their hard-headed success, are employing symbolic logic and the calculating machine to improve and create new business.

For example, a question asked might be, "what is the best size for a telephone exchange?" Expensive trial and error might give a close answer, but translate the question into symbols, feed it to a calculating machine, and in minutes, the correct answer comes out. This, mind you, in spite of the fact that hundreds of thousands of variables might have to be considered!

Science has vindicated old Leibnitz's judgment. The calculus of logic is an important and growing branch of applied knowledge. How it will affect tomorrow can be clearly seen—industry is betting on symbolic logic even in the sales department—and happily!



"Oh stop looking at me as if I were some sort of monster!"

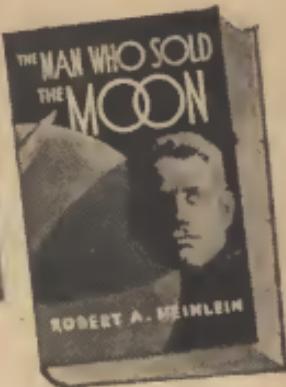
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INTRODUCING The Author

★ *Robert Bloch* ★

(Concluded from Page 2)

scripts, and managed to sell several hundred short stories and novelettes, plus five books. At one time I thought of becoming a newspaperman, but I couldn't find a vacant corner.

I've been married since 1941, and have managed to acquire a daughter, aged eleven, and a dog, aged three — although not by similar methods. At present the family lives in Weyauwega, Wisconsin in a quaint old mortgage-covered cottage surrounded by row upon row of tall, stately creditors.

My principle hobbies consist of misanthropy, hypochondria, stasis, and advanced penury. Minor occupations — reading, oil-painting, collecting records, and boring people with accounts of silent movies.

My pet gripe is probably commonplace among writers — it consists of the tendency of readers to confuse the author with his subject-matter. In my situation (hereafter referred to as "hopeless") it's particularly annoying, because I am apt to utilize a variety of styles and a variety of subjects.

People who read my allegedly

humorous efforts (such as the story in this issue) are prone to think of me as humorous: as far as I'm concerned, they can stay prone. People who read my horror stories insist that I must be more pedantic than antic, and given to consorting with vampires, werewolves and used-car salesmen. People who read my suspense novels imagine that I'm a strangler, ripper, kidnapper and criminal psychopath; little do they realize I haven't the energy!

But I am grateful for the fact that through the years my occupation has enabled me to come into contact with so many interesting people: the rewards in friendship are far greater than can be found in any other form of endeavor. A writer, though his avowed purpose is to amuse and entertain, is always basically motivated by a need to communicate with others — and in this I've always found pleasure.

If, in return, I can manage to turn out material that gives a little pleasure to readers, I consider myself fortunate.

—*Robert Bloch*

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